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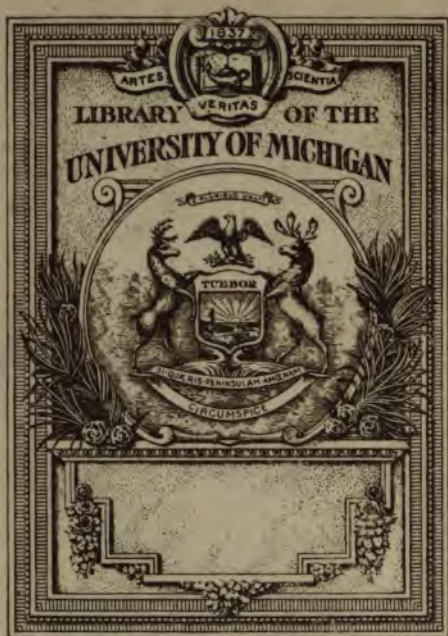
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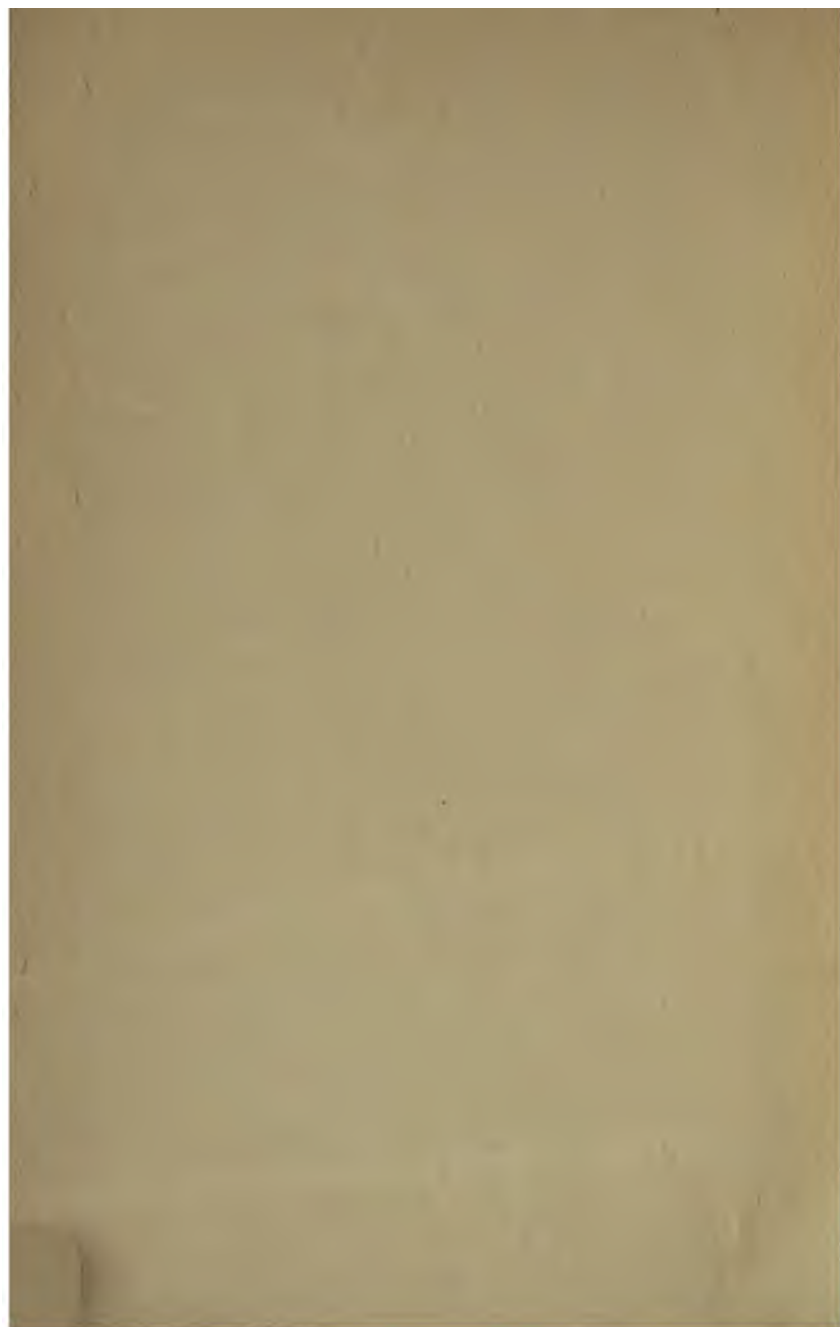
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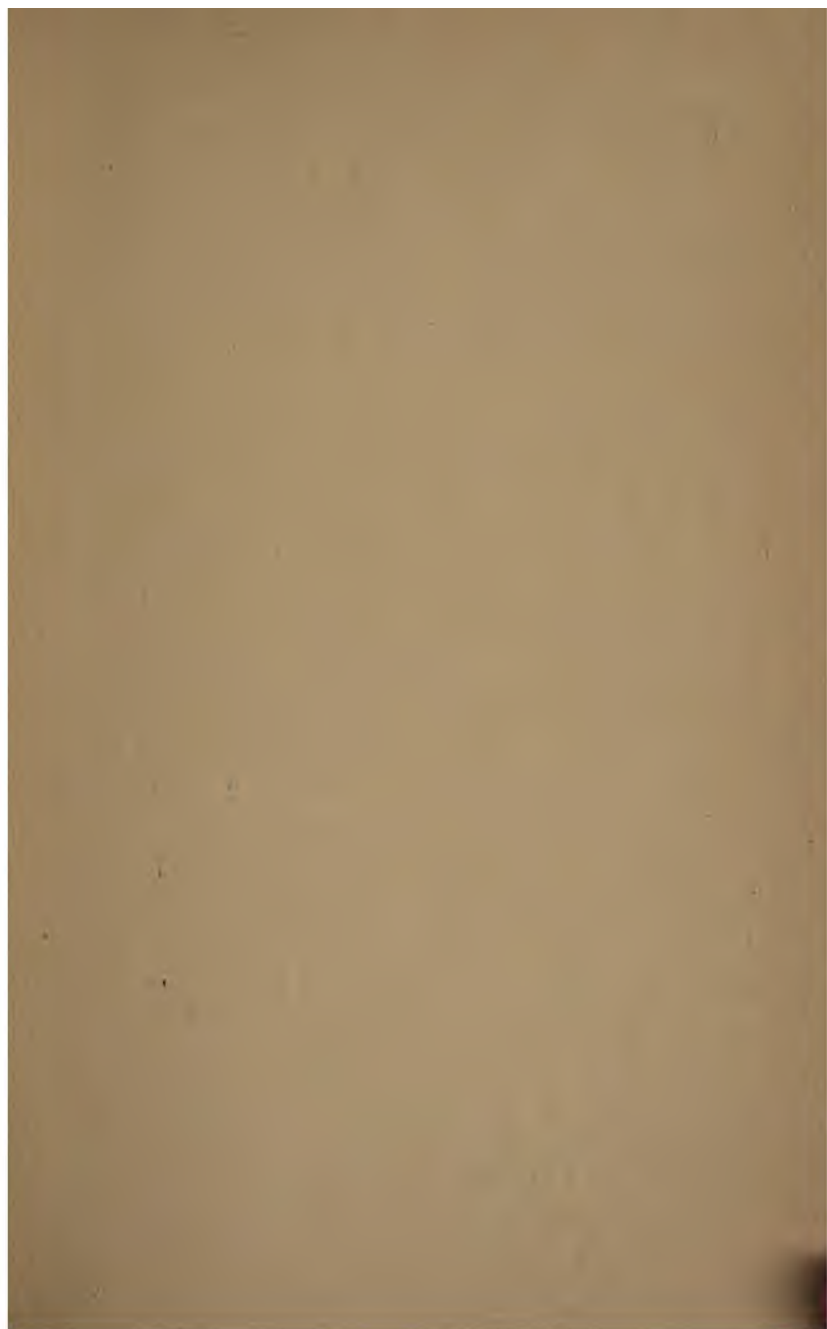
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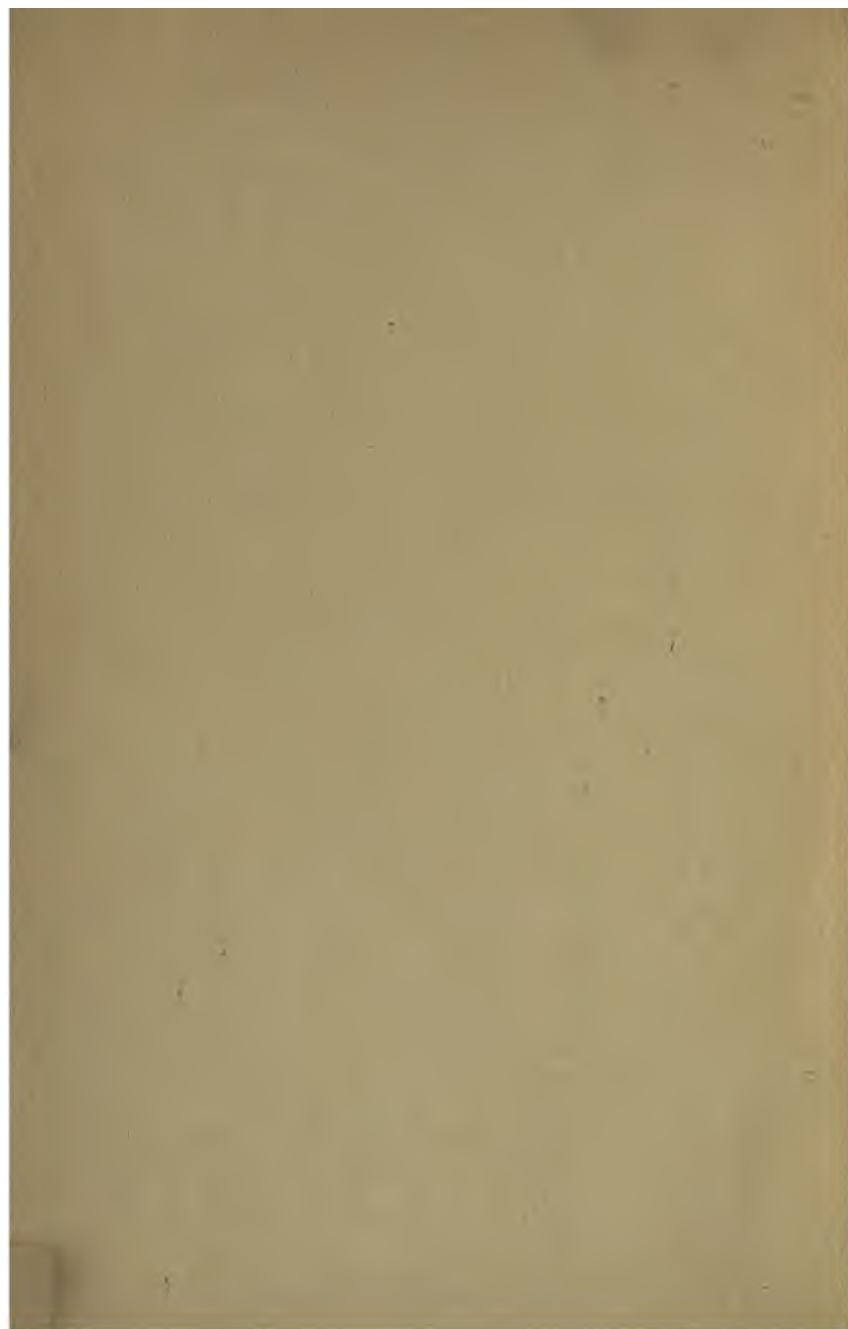
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MATER



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TORONTO

MATER

An American Study in Comedy

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

New York

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1912

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To

THE AUTHOR OF

"THE ECONOMY OF HAPPINESS"

THIS DAFFODIL IS LAID IN ITS MARGIN

BY HIS BROTHER

250388

CHARACTERS

MATILDA DEAN (*"Mater"*).

MICHAEL DEAN, *her son.*

MARY DEAN, *her daughter.*

ARTHUR CULLEN.

RUDOLPH VERBECK.

TIME. — *To-day.*

PLACE. — *A City in Eastern United States.*

SCENE

LIVING-ROOM IN THE DEANS' HOUSE

ACT I. — MORNING.

ACT II. — A FEW DAYS LATER: AFTERNOON.

ACT III. — MIDNIGHT.

FOREWORD

THE acting rights of this play are owned by Mr. Henry Miller, under whose direction it was first produced in San Francisco, at the Van Ness Theatre, August 3, 1908, and in New York, at the Savoy Theatre, September 25, 1908.

The music to Mater's song in the play has been composed by Professor George W. Chadwick, Director of the Boston Conservatory of Music, and may be had, arranged for the piano, in published form.

P. M-K.

CORNISH, NEW HAMPSHIRE,
September, 1908.

ACT I

ACT I

The living-room in the Deans' house, simply furnished, with an atmosphere of books, pictures, music and domesticity. In color, the prevailing tones are harmonious browns. The walls are panelled high with oak, above which they are covered with a soft brocade of unobtrusive design. In the back wall, at centre, hung with long curtains, a large casement window, with deep, cushioned seat, looks out upon the tops of fruit trees toward neighboring city houses. On both sides of the window are book-cases. Near the right wall, at back, the room opens, by a curtained doorway, into a hall, where the newel-post and descending balustrade of a stairway are visible. In the left wall, between doors, is a fireplace, above which is hung the large oil portrait [head and bust] of a middle-aged man — a face of strong character and vitality.

Against the right wall, a divan, below which a door opens into a closet with shelves. At right, a baby-grand piano, with ruddy brown case; at left, an ample table, on which — amid newspapers, books, sewing materials and manuscripts — stands a telephone instrument.

At this table are seated MARY DEAN and RUDOLF VERBECK. Mary, who is dressed in black and wears rimless spectacles, is a handsome girl of strong features, dark hair and intense eyes. She is reading aloud from a thick volume. Rudolf, a Dutch-American type of young man, is gazing at her with a look of forced concentration and unforced affection.

MATER

MARY

[*Reads.*]

“To destroy human egotism is impossible. Therefore let us direct it so as to make it serve the ends of society instead of subverting them. Now there is reason to believe that society, through organization, can be converted into a great happiness-producing mechanism, and that self-interest can be utilized to drive it. Thus we shall not have to essay the hopeless task of destroying egotism in man, but by simply diverting its channel from competition to coöperation, convert it into a mighty power for the good — instead of the harm — of mankind.”

RUDOLF

Mary! That's the point.

MARY

What?

RUDOLF

Egotism. It's for our good, you know.

MARY

To be sure; if it's rightly diverted.

RUDOLF

That's what I mean. You see, it's self-interest that makes me ask it.

MARY

Ask what?

RUDOLF

When are we going to be married?

MARY

Rudolf Verbeck, you're incorrigible! You have as much power of generalization as a June bug.

RUDOLF

Just the same, your brother's book there gives me the lead.

MARY

Your sense of proportion is crude, my dear. My brother's book is concerned with the great interests of society; and compared to such, I assure you, our engagement and marriage are of very trifling concern.

RUDOLF

Oh, but I say! I ain't trifling.

MARY

[*Her teeth on edge.*]

Please! Whatever you are, or aren't, don't say *ain't*.

RUDOLF

I know, but when a fellow's in love —

MARY

Not that! I've told you — this is the tenth time at least — you are never to mention *that* to me again till after Michael is elected.

RUDOLF

But what if he ain't — *isn't* elected?

MARY

Then I shall devote myself solely to him until he is. Michael is the youngest man ever nominated for the legislature; if he fails of election now, he must run again. He is needed in the nation. He must be a force to shape its chaos, to stem its corruption. But you know he is far from well. The launching of his life-work must be my first concern — and yours, if you care for me. You — you *do* care for me?

RUDOLF

Care! You know, girl, I love —

MARY

[*Holding the volume interceptingly.*]

Love me — love my brother's book! Read, please. My glasses are dusty.

[*She takes off her spectacles and wipes them. He takes the book and reads vaguely.*]

RUDOLF

"Common Sense and the Common Weal: by Michael Dean."

MARY

You needn't read the cover. I stopped on page 78.

RUDOLF

[*Hastening to find the place.*]

Good.

[*Reads quickly.*]

"The social structure I propose may conveniently be expounded under eight topics:

First, Public ownership of the means of production, retention of the wage system and abolition of profit.

Second, Organization of a system of distribution, whereby supply and demand in products may be adjusted.

Third, Organization of a national labor exchange, whereby supply and demand in labor may be adjusted." —

Adjusted—say, Mary!

MARY

What?

RUDOLF

You *will* adjust it all right—if we elect him?

[*Mary snatches the book from him and turns away.*]

I was only talking of supply and demand!

MARY

If you say one word more of it, I won't speak to you for a week.

[*Relentlessly returning him the book.*]

Now, take *in* what you read.

RUDOLF

[*Reads on gropingly.*]

"Fourth, Organization of an inspection system, whereby the quality of products may be retained at a definite standard.

Fifth, Application of labor to production.

Sixth, Organization of invention.
Seventh, Old age insurance.
Eighth, Reform of Education."

MARY

— Rudolfo! To think when he's elected, Michael will be a living factor in all this. And the campaign is going on gloriously.

RUDOLF

I wish to-morrow was election day.

MARY

Do you remember, in the settlement work, down there in the slums, how they shouted for him that first meeting; and when they saw him—

RUDOLF

I remember when I first saw *you* there, addressing the Mothers and Daughters' Club, and starting a campaign of clean clothes. How in thunder did you ever cut and stitch that mountain of pinafores?

MARY

Oh, Mater attends to that for me. She's just domestic and practical, you know. I'm concerned with the large principles and statistics. I'm a very humble disciple of my great brother.

RUDOLF

I thought your mother's trump cards were books and pianos and such.

MARY

I suppose you mean dabbling in lyrics and poets and such light stuff? Yes, Mater mixes that up with her housekeeping. She's an outlandish little person — of course, very nice and dear and useful — but when it comes to serious things — Oh, quite beyond her depth! Politics, sociology, for instance — she hasn't the first ray of comprehension.

RUDOLF

Never mind — *you* have! And I know the poor dirty people love you for what you are doing for 'em.

MARY

Oh, it's Michael they love. And they look to him as a new young prophet — a prophet of reason and joy. And it isn't only the poor — it's the overworked men everywhere, eager to see a way out of forced labor into free life. Do you know what they call this book? The busy-man's Bible. Ah, when Michael is elected, Rudolf, do you know the first thing we must do?

[Rudolf, leaping up impetuous, kisses her. Mary springs from him and looks back wrathfully.]

The last time, the very last! I vow it. Now I won't speak to you again till after election day.

RUDOLF

[Calling heaven to witness.]

And I never said a word!

[Enter MICHAEL DEAN, lower left. He is without his coat—in his shirt sleeves. With both hands clasped behind his head, he strides across the room, and paces back and forth, oblivious of Mary and Rudolf.

Mary pauses in her own mood of anger, which evaporates as she watches him with eager attention and some little awe.]

RUDOLF

[Not observing Michael—beseechingly.]

Mary! Forget it—please! I won't make another—

[Mary raises her hand to Rudolf in stern warning of silence—looking at Michael, who in his paces comes to a standstill in front of her, riveting an abstracted gaze upon her face as if it were far away.]

MARY

Is it finished, Michael? All thought out?

MICHAEL

[Looks at her, vaguely quizzical, biting the edge of his thumb.]

Eh?

MARY

I have just been reading your “Common Sense” with Rudolf. I wish in your next campaign speech you would sum up that splendid chapter on Liberty.

MICHAEL

Liberty, my dear sir! Where did you find it?

MARY

[Pointing to the book.]

Why, there. — You're not ill again?

MATER

II

MICHAEL

[*Impatiently.*]

What, what?

MARY

I'm not your *dear sir*, you know.

MICHAEL

[*Drawing a deep breath, smiles faintly.*]

Hello, sisterkin!— I was thinking of that fellow Cullen.

MARY

Cullen!

[*With a touch of embarrassment.*]

What Mr. Cullen?

MICHAEL

The Honorable Arthur!

MARY

Honorable?

MICHAEL

Of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Grafters.— Grand Master!— Hello, Verbeck.

[*Gives Rudolf his hand.*]

RUDOLF

[*Waving the volume in his other hand.*]

Say! It's real meat.

MICHAEL

Have you tried to digest it?

MATER

MARY

You mean the notorious Cullen of the legislature?

MICHAEL

To whose brotherhood I am now aspiring. Heaven forgive — one of us!

RUDOLF

[*With vague alarm.*]

Brotherhood? You —

MICHAEL

If you elect me, Rudolf.

RUDOLF

Oh, that's what you mean. Well, that's what I'm living for.

[*With a beseeching look toward Mary, who keeps on the opposite side of the room.*]

— Ask Mary.

MARY

Is he in your way?

MICHAEL

[*Absorbed again.*]

Who?

MARY

[*Hesitatingly.*]

Mr. Cullen. Is he obstructing you politically?

MICHAEL

That's the question. The Honorable Arthur has been singularly affable to me — lately.

RUDOLF

[Looking anxiously at Mary.]

Lately? More than usual?

MICHAEL

So I've noticed. And I don't like it, for I don't trust him. He has risen in life by what his friends call a sense of humor, and that, if I'm not mistaken, is the liveliest endowment of the Devil. I'd rather face a rhinoceros than an ineradicable smile. — That reminds me — he's to call me up this morning on a matter of business.

MARY

He's *for* you in the election?

MICHAEL

So he explained — with his smile. His influence is to go my way — for my father the Senator's sake.

MARY

Did Mr. Cullen know father?

MICHAEL

Only by reputation — far off. Our father, I'm sure, never knew Cullen.

[Looking up at the portrait on the wall.]

There was a man, thank God, and a magician! He knew how to pipe the rats from their nests in the nation, and to purge the temple of the state without fouling his own fingers. Give me to be like him.

— Mary, does it seem possible that he has gone from us: one year ago to-day!

MARY

But you live on — to finish his work.

MICHAEL

Finish? It has no end.

RUDOLF

Yes, old fellow. When you're in office, there'll be something doing!

MICHAEL

Something doing! So what will be doing — Eh? — when I'm in office?

RUDOLF

Something big, that's sure.

MICHAEL

“Big,” and “something.” Just *what* doesn't matter, I suppose, so long as it's big?

RUDOLF

I mean you'll keep things busy.

MICHAEL

“Busy” — of course! Big, Busy, Barnum and Bailey — all with a B! Get into the circus, statesmen, three rings and a loop-the-loop — and keep the public guessing!

By Heaven, Verbeck, I believe there are no more dangerous citizens than just such good fools as you. You pay for your seat at the show — *Bang!* goes the clown's head through the hoop. *Spin!* goes your hat in the air, and "Hurrah!" you bawl; "Even so God created the world and the solar system."

[*He begins to pace back and forth again and speaks with vehement swiftness.*]

"Something doing." It's the quack showman's motto of the age! Under that banner, we harvest a million acres of wheat to fill a hundred millions of mouths, and we rear up the mouths to be filled with the wheat. Under that banner, we move a continent of freight cars to consume steel rails, and we disembowel the continent for steel to move the freight cars. Under that banner, we fell mountains of forest to feed a myriad presses with Sunday editions, and we set up a myriad presses to devour the wood-pulp. "Something doing!" Motion, my friend. *Motion* is the God of such as you, and so far as you can, you make yourselves in his image.

He's a glorious Titan — your *Motion!* His brow is of gold and his bowels of brass; his biceps of iron and his thighs of silver. His beard is black smoke. His heart is pure steel. Within his head he has a billion wheels, and when he opens his mouth to speak through his beard, the clang of his voice is the noise thereof.

Look in the morning above the cities, and you shall see his hair obscuring the day, and his eyes like arc

lights. [In the palm of one hand he holds the great god Pan — no taller than a pigmy; and in the other fist he clutches a worm called Man.] “Behold me!” he cries to the heavens; [even from this worm have I arisen, and even to this stature have I grown beyond this pigmy.] Behold me, you sun and moon! Am I not Busy? Am I not Big? I am the Lord of Hosts — I am Prosperity! I am —

MATER*

[*Entering.*]

Button! Button! Who’s got the button?

MICHAEL

[*Glaring desperately as she approaches with his coat.*]

Mater, Mater, how you do interrupt!

MATER

Boy, you carried off the button in your pocket.

[*Feels in his pockets and finds it.*]

MICHAEL

Damn the button!

MATER

Shh! Remember this afternoon! You can’t address the Reform Club with a whole heart — and one button missing.

* She appears in the doorway, — lower left — holding Michael’s coat, a needle and thread. Upon her blond, wavy hair is a wreath of daffodils, and she wears a fresh becoming gown of yellow and buff.

MICHAEL

I can address the universe in my night-shirt, if I like. Give me the coat.

MATER

[*Helping him on with it.*]

Of course; put it on. That's much better.

[*He starts to walk away. Catching her needle and thread through the front of his coat, she begins to sew on the button.*]

Now go right ahead, dear. I can listen beautifully while I sew.

MICHAEL

[*Gloomily.*]

Here's a prophet in his own country!

MARY

[*Approaching Mater, looks particularly hard at her wreath, speaking sternly.*]

How could you, mother!

MATER

[*Sewing, as Michael—his hands in his pockets—turns away.*]

I can't—very well.

RUDOLF

You sized me up pretty small, Dean.

MICHAEL

Did I? Forgive me; I'm tired.

MATER

MATER

[*With a glance of solicitude.*]

Tired, boy?

[*She sits on a chair beside Michael, sewing on the button.*]

RUDOLF

That's all right. But I didn't catch your drift, just. Next time I start something doing, how am I to know whether it's right or wrong?

MICHAEL

The only test of right and wrong is common sense.

MATER

So it is, dear. There's my own philosopher.

RUDOLF

Well, then, ain't it common sense for us Americans to develop our national resources?

MICHAEL

Yes, so long as we, as a nation, develop them to the one common-sense end.

RUDOLF

What's that?

MICHAEL

National happiness; nothing else.

RUDOLF

Why, of course. That's why we're *all* in business.

MICHAEL

Is it? I think not. You're in business—for business; nothing else. You see to the end of your nose and then your eyes cross. So the huge world of business, in which you are an atom, careens in a vast orbit of itself—chasing forever the end of existence, as a kitten the end of its tail.

RUDOLF

Hmm! I don't see it. Why, man, nothing can stop us from going it, just like we are—only more so. It's Destiny; and I say, it's great. Don't you?

MICHAEL

What's great?

RUDOLF

Just being America. [And since it's great, why then—wheat and steel, people and towns, the more the merrier.

MICHAEL

The more indeed—if it *be* the merrier. But no more—if it be *not* the merrier. The need of our country to-day is not more towns, but happier towns; not more men, but happier men; not life itself, unless it be life worth living.]

RUDOLF

[Oh] come, Dean. You know you want America to be the greatest nation on the globe.

MICHAEL

I do! I want America to be the Hercules—not the megatherium—of the nations.

RUDOLF

The mega — which ?

MATER

[Rising, and putting aside her sewing materials.]

Now, baby boy, you're a poet.

MICHAEL

[With a gesture of chagrin, sits in the chair she has just left.]

Then let me be exiled. Poets! Your old friend Plato had *one* good idea, — he banished all poets from his Republic. The whole pack of 'em have been bitten with mad words and got the logomania. They should be muzzled.

[Mater comes behind the chair and, while he continues talking, hovers over him, smoothes his coat collar, takes some threads off his shoulder, sleeks his hair with her hands and, taking her scissors, snips some wry locks over his ears.]

Whenever the times are in gloom or panic, each breed has his own bark: Inalienable Rights! — Return to Nature! — The Truth of Beauty! — The Point of View! — The Voice of Conscience! — You may hear them baying in chorus, tenor and basso, from stump and bar and inkpot and pulpit — these moon-dogs of the nation — while the people run to and fro, crying "Saved!" But none yet ever has voiced the excellent salvation of Common sense. *[Leaping up.]* — What on earth are you doing, Mater ?

MATER

[*Standing beside the empty chair, clicks her shears and bows toward Mary, with the urbanity of a hairdresser.*]

Next!

MARY

Oh, this is too bad. You keep spoiling it all.

MATER

[*Trilling her r's à la Français.*]

Ah, Madame, but with a pretty pompadour and a little rat's nest inside, *n'est ce pas?*

[*She rumples Mary's hair with her fingers.*]

MARY

[*Escaping from her.*]

Mother, why haven't you a little maturity?

MATER

[*Pensively.*]

I suppose I gave birth to it all, dear, when you were born.

MARY

If only you wouldn't break in on serious discussions. You *know* you know nothing of politics. — Where are those infants' clothes for the Orphans' Home?

MATER

The little night-gowns? They're loves! I've finished them.

MATER

MARY

Pack them up, please. I promised them for the Alliance meeting this afternoon.

MATER

[Going to the closet.]

I'll show them to you.

[Opening the closet door, she lifts some heaped articles of apparel, and lays them in a basket.]

MICHAEL

[Gazing before him, ostensibly speaking to Mary.]

Yes! The orchards of Reason are ripening: already the people have begun to pluck. Out of their sufferings, surely, very surely, rises the sane revolution of joy.

[With a great breath.]

And I shall be one of the Orchard-keepers! One of the vindicators of philosophy!

MATER

[Approaching with her basket, filled with baby-clothes, smiles quaintly at Michael.]

“How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute —”

[Turning and presenting the basket.]

Mary, here are your nighties.

MARY

[Starting away.]

They're not *mine*!

MATER

Really ?

[Holding up a tiny night-gown with drawers.]

Rudolf, are they yours ?

MARY

[Exasperated.]

Mater !

[Snatching the nightie.]

That's simply — impossible !

MATER

There! I *knew* it.*[Bubbling with mirth, she puts back the basket in the closet.]*

RUDOLF

[Explaining, with obtuse earnestness.]

She means, they're for the Orphan Asylum.

MATER

[Beckoning to Rudolf, looks at Mary and Michael. The former has joined her brother at the large table, where he has spread some manuscripts. Beyond them hangs the portrait of the Senator.]

Rudolf, look at them — both. Can you see them — distinctly ?

RUDOLF

[Mystified.]

See them ?

MATER

Those two — in a rosy cloud there.

MATER

RUDOLF

You mean —

MATER

The future presidents of the United States and Vassar College! Tell me: Can you guess where I ever got them?

RUDOLF

You mean —

MATER

Not so loud! They are fairies — out of Mother Goose. *I* was the goose. I lived in an old little barn-yard, under a hill. Oh, it was ages ago!

RUDOLF

Do you mean —

MATER

[*Nodding mysteriously.*]

'Way back in New England — on the sunshiny side of the hill. One lone, little, yellow-feather, sunny-weather goose, with a sky-blue puddle for a hand-glass. That was *me!* Do you want to know how it all happened?

— In a storm! 'Twas spring o' the year, just at equinox, when the winds ruffle your feathers till they show the white. That's why I turned tail for home. But before I could reach my hand-glass, there he stood! Tall — black — terrible — his head high in the thunder, his beautiful eyes in the darkness — black, an ink-black swan!

RUDOLF

[*In a low voice, looking toward the portrait.*]

You mean —

MATER

[*Nods with a reminiscent smile.*]

Him. — My dear, fancy it! I had never seen even a gander before. And now, in a glare of lightning — that wonderful swan-dragon! For his feathers in the dark were fiery scales; his crest was like purple iris; his eyes were far up and starry; and when he struck at the storm with his flashing beak, the sky was all fire. — Just a clap of thunder, and the hillside was far away. On his great black wings he bore me high over the world, and we lighted, at break of day, on the golden dome of a Capitol. — Heigho, Mother Goose! Mother Goose! In the shadow of the golden dome she hatched two chicks, and — will you believe me? — *All* their goosequills were ink-black.

MICHAEL

[*Tugging with his teeth at his pen-holder.*]

Double damnation on this pen!

MATER

[*To Rudolf.*]

Hush! He's pulling one out with his beak.

MICHAEL

First it's busted and now it's rusted in.

[*Flinging it to the floor and rising.*]

How many times, Mater, have I asked you to keep a clean new pen on my desk!

MATER

Dear swan-boy, I thought —

MICHAEL

But you didn't do it. I want one ready — always ready.

MATER

[*Whimsically.*]

Boy?

MICHAEL

I know, Mater, but bad pens are used only in Purgatory.

MATER

[*Going closer to him.*]

Don't you like daffodils? — Smell!

MICHAEL

[*Looks down at the wreath.*]

What? Where did you get them, this time of year?

MATER

You know, that pleasant gentleman — what's his name?

[*Mary, in precipitate haste, reaches over and pulls Mater's gown. Mater turns to her.*]

[*Anything wrong with my skirt?*]

[*Mary, glancing toward Rudolf, makes to Mater indescribable faces of cautionary silence, which she ignores.*]

Oh, of course; *you* remember it, Mary, — Mr. Lucky, or Sullen, or —

RUDOLF

[*Starting.*]

Who?

MARY

I don't know what you're talking about, mother. And I don't think it can be of any great consequence.

MATER

Of course not. The only question of great consequence in all the world at this minute is — remember it!

[*She pauses, raising one monitory finger as in grave portent.*]

MICHAEL

[*Interested.*]

What?

MATER

[*With a ripple of laughter, throws herself into his arms.*]

Do you *love* me?

MICHAEL

[*Returning her hug.*]

Ha, little Mater! You are good for nothing but sewing and singing —

MATER

[*Playfully.*]

And silliness!

MICHAEL

And silliness.

MATER

MATER

And soap-bubble castles !

MICHAEL

And chateaus in Spain !

MATER

[*Wistfully.*]

And nothing else ?

MICHAEL

And nothing else. But I like you better than —

MATER

[*Quickly.*]

Politics ?

MICHAEL

Better even than politics !

MATER

I don't believe it. Prove it.

MICHAEL

[*Shrugs.*]

How ?

MATER

You are all worn out. This pen-holder is my witness.
Come with me for a lark in the country — for one
week.

MICHAEL

In the country — *this* week ! And every day a
campaign speech till election !

MATER

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MATER

So
[So: "Better than politics!" — perjurer!]

MICHAEL

[Besides] you don't understand. If you want me to be well, if that's what you're after —

MATER

[*Passionately.*]

It's *all* I'm after.

MICHAEL

There's one sure road to that.

MATER

Tell me.

MICHAEL

I must be elected.

[*With deep vehemence.*]

I must be elected!

MATER

[*Troubled.*]

And if you shouldn't be?

MICHAEL

Then I will not rest, day or night, till I am. — Not if I die for it!

MATER

Don't, Michael.

MICHAEL

I know the goal, I know the path, for our people.

I have pointed out the goal as a writer; I must help to shape the path as a representative!

MATER

[*Quietly.*]

I know. — You are like *him*.

MICHAEL

Tell me that I am, Mater. It heartens me.

MATER

[I have a little picture of him, just at your age.

MICHAEL

At my age?

MATER

[*Lifting from the table a little gold-framed mirror holds it close to Michael's face.*]

Look.

MICHAEL

So like as that?

[*Mater hides her face against him.*]

I thank God for it. The world shall meet him again — in me.] Little Mater, there is a vow I want to make aloud, and I want you and Mary to make it with me, here by his portrait, as I remember him.

MATER

[*Starting back with a frightened look.*]

I don't like vows.

MICHAEL

[*Slowly.*]

You don't like vows?

MATER

Good people never keep them. That is, they oughtn't.

MICHAEL

Oughtn't!

MATER

I mean, they needn't. You see, it mortgages the future with the past.

MICHAEL

My future is in endless debt to his past.

MATER

Don't say that, boy. He — he wouldn't like it.

MICHAEL

Have you forgotten what day it is? What anniversary?

MATER

Oh, I hate anniversaries.

MICHAEL

But to-day — the reminder of —

MATER

Not of that! He was never *that*. He was life. He was always life.

MICHAEL

That's my vow — *our* vow, Mater. Come!

MATER

MATER

[*Hesitant.*]

I'd rather — will it please you?

MICHAEL

[*With startled sadness.*]

Will it not — you?

MATER

[*Cheerfully.*]

Oh, very much indeed!

[*To Mary, drawing her affectionately.*]

Come, my other swan!

[*Hugging them both.*]

Dear, incredible twins!

MARY

[*With an impulsive caress.*]

Liebes Mütterchen!

MICHAEL

[*Looking up at the portrait, speaks simply.*]

Father, one year ago the vision fell from your eyes, the power from your hand. To-day I take up both and restore them to you in myself. And myself I dedicate, as you dedicated yourself, to our country's leadership. The way is open at last. In this campaign my career begins — without fetters and without deceit. Uncompromisingly I will walk in your clean path, uncompromisingly these women will help me in this vow.

[*Turning with emotion to Mater and Mary.*]

Won't you?

[*Mater and Mary go to him affectionately. As they do so the telephone on the desk before them rings. Michael sits and lifts the receiver.*]

Oh, it's you, Cullen. Good morning.

MATER

Why, it's that delightful—

MARY

Hush, mother!

MICHAEL

[*At the telephone.*]

What's that? Yes, I can see you. You'd like me to decide to-day. Well, what's the proposition?

[*A pause. Michael's brow suddenly knits, and with his right hand he crushes some papers on the table.*]

— Four thousand dollars. And you want me — Considering the what? — Oh, the great consequences. A trifle, of course! — You *will* explain? I think, sir, it will be necessary. — The sooner the better. — An alternative, you say. What is it? — I see; you will *explain*. — Yes, she is at home. What of it?

RUDOLF

[*Starting.*]

Who's at home?

[*Mater smiles at Mary. Mary turns away.*]

MATER

MICHAEL

—What? I don't catch it. Oh, very well. — In quarter of an hour; all right.

[He hangs up the receiver.]

MATER

Be careful; you're crumpling your nice manuscripts.

[Michael rises and lets the crushed papers slip scattering from his hand.]

MICHAEL

I see. They will initiate me — behind closed doors. I shall be a knight of their secret order — one of the mighty oligarchs of our democracy. God! It was almost mine, I had almost touched it, and now — contamination! contamination!

[He staggers and sinks into a chair.]

MATER

[Bending over him.]

Boy, what is it?

[Mary and Rudolf come near on either side.]

MARY

[To Rudolf.]

Some brandy.

MICHAEL

[With a gesture.]

No.

MATER

Your work is wearing you out, dear.

MICHAEL

[*Looking at the three.*]

My work is stopped — for the present.

MATER

Thank heaven!

MICHAEL

I am not to be elected.

MARY

Michael!

RUDOLF

Gad!

MICHAEL

Not this year.

[*Rising.*]But I *will* be elected at last!

MATER

What *has* happened? What did that charming
Mr. Cullen want of you?

MICHAEL

A little matter of four thousand dollars.

MARY

For what?

MICHAEL

To make a very old mare go.

MARY

A mare!

MATER

MICHAEL

You never heard of the all-party mascot? Why, she's an old stager. She helped to pull the Congressional coach in pioneer days, and to-day she is hitched to the campaign band-wagon. Her off eye winks; three legs of her are black, and all four are game. But she's a live old mare yet, is old Bribery.

MATER

[Who has been counting on her fingers.]

Four thousand you said? That's not so much.

MICHAEL

Considering the great consequences — a trifle!

MATER

[Jubilantly.]

Don't worry, boy. I've got it.

MICHAEL

[Darkly.]

What?

MATER

I've got —

[Aware of his contracting brows]

— an idea. I will see Mr. Cullen.

MICHAEL

See Cullen? — You!

MATER

Woman to man, you know.

MICHAEL

What in nonsense do you mean by woman to man ?

MATER

Oh, just Eve and Adam and all that.

MICHAEL

Mater, are you daft—or aren't you grown-up yet?

MATER

Forty-four next month, my dear. Is Mr. Cullen coming this morning?

MICHAEL

He is. What can *you* have to say to him?

MATER

I shall say to him that you have nervous dyspepsia, and he must elect you immediately.

MICHAEL

And for this you'll hand him a cheque for four thousand dollars?

MATER

[*With naïveté.*]

Not all in a cheque. The money's mostly in Savings Banks.

MATER

MICHAEL

[*Blankly.*]

And you were married to father for twenty-six years!

[*He walks away.*]

MATER

And, my dear, while he was in the Senate, I helped him out of many such pickles.

MICHAEL

[*Turning fiercely.*]

Mater! Not like this! You never paid money for father in a case like this!

MATER

No; he never would let me. That's just the way he would scowl. But then I contrived somehow, and it always came out all right.

MICHAEL

Somehow! What do you mean?

MATER

Why, your father, you know, could see only one right thing at a time; but I always manage to see several points of view.

MICHAEL

Points of view are perdition.

MATER

So he told me.

MICHAEL

A given act must be right or wrong ; not both.

MATER

Common sense or nonsense, of course ! So whenever I found some necessary little compromise —

MICHAEL

Compromise ! — And father knew of this ?

MATER

[Startled at his voice.]

Oh, never at the time. I always told him afterwards, and then we'd make up.

MICHAEL

This is terrible. "Afterwards !" How *could* he make up !] I can't bear it.

[Going toward the door, lower left.]

Let me know when Cullen arrives. And here —

[Indicating some newspaper clippings on the table.]

Please attend to these. Come, Mary ; I must talk with you — upstairs.

[Pausing at the door, which Mary opens.]

Mater, one thing you must promise me now : Never to meddle in my career without my knowl-

edge. I ask your loving help ; but not your loving subterfuge. Promise me, once and forever, never to deceive me in this.

MATER

Boy, I promise you, work-bells and kirk-bells !

MICHAEL

[Pointing to the portrait.]

Remember our vow — there. I will see Cullen when he comes.

[Exeunt MICHAEL and MARY.]

MATER

[Looks after them, humming low and tapping with her foot.]

Dear, dear ! Dear, dear !

[She bursts into soft laughter. Rudolf approaches and looks at her with earnest perplexity.]

RUDOLF

Mrs. Dean —

MATER

[Starting.]

Nonsense, Rudolf. Call me *Mater*. You'll be my son in a jiffy.

[As she talks with Rudolf, Mater moves lightly about the room. Picking up the crumpled sheets of manuscript, she smoothes them out, puts a new pen in the holder, examines the packet of clippings and places them in an open scrap-book on the table.]

RUDOLF

Thanks, Mrs. — Mater. But that's just what keeps me guessing. This morning, Mary told me right here that compared to this book

[*Slamming down Michael's volume on the table.*]

and her brother's career, our marriage was a very trifling concern.

MATER

Did she say that? Oh, delicious!

RUDOLF

Delicious! She said that her work is to make humanity in America —

MATER

Of course it is. Her work is to get married to you, and make American sons and daughters.

RUDOLF

She won't get married, she says, till her brother is elected. You know when she sets her teeth, she hangs on hard.

MATER

I know. I call her Molly Mud-turtle; she pokes so in her slums, and snaps when you pull her out.

RUDOLF

She snapped me all right this morning. Said she wouldn't speak to me again till after election. I wonder! That political fellow on the telephone—

Michael said to him: "She's at home." Who do they call *she*?

MATER

The Ship, stupid!

RUDOLF

Ship!

MATER

Ship of State, you know. Whenever Michael converses with politicians, he talks their dialect.

RUDOLF

Say, Mater, you're a great fixer. Please fix it up with Mary for me, won't you?

MATER

Never fear, fond lover!

When fair wind blows

The weather-cock crows.

I'll send you a fair wind.

RUDOLF

Well, I must light out.

[*From the hall.*]

And listen, Mater, he's *got* to be elected. Fix that, too.

MATER

[*Waving to him.*]

That, too.

[*Exit RUDOLF by the stairs.*]

[Bringing a pot of paste to the table, Mater undoes the packet of clippings and begins to arrange some in the scrap-book.]

Enter MARY, left. With flashing eyes, she approaches Mater, looking at her wreath.]

MARY

Those daffodils!

MATER

What! Are they wilting?

MARY

He sent them to *me*.

MATER

And you threw them away.

MARY

Of course I threw them away. You think I care for *him*?

MATER

Don't you? I dote on him. He has such a Utopian sense of humor. So foreign to our family!

MARY

Why, he's a grafter—a corrupt villain!

MATER

Really? Now to me, my dear, his smile quite infects his character.

[Looking in the hand-glass at her wreath.]

Nonsense; they're as fresh as ever.

MATER

MARY

You surely know that he's Michael's worst enemy.

MATER

I didn't know that was settled. Then it is particularly important I should like him, isn't it?

MARY

Oh, mother, you have no more logic than an infant. And look at you there in that dress, and those daffodils! I don't wonder he made that ridiculous mistake when he met you and me at the Robinsons' dinner party. I'm sure I really feel complimented.

MATER

I knew you would, Mary. That's why I appropriated these flowers he sent here addressed to "Miss Dean." They just suit my hair. And I know when I tell Rudolf —

MARY

[*Flushing.*]

If you dare! Do you think that I want Rudolf to know that Mr. Cullen mistook *me* for your *mother*?

MATER

Me rather, for your *daughter*, my dear. I don't remember that he paid you any attention, except to notice your spectacles and your elderly black gown.

MARY

Elderly! I declare you should be ashamed, mother,
—under the circumstances— not to wear mourning.

MATER

[*With deep feeling, simply.*]

You see, dear, I hate black — and all it means.

MARY

No, I don't see anything *you* mean. You are absolutely immature and provoking. And those night-gowns — mine! And Rudolf standing right by! Oh, it's too much.

MATER

But, my dear, they *were* darlings!

MARY

[*Shrilly, stopping her ears.*]

Be quiet! Since you can't reason, I must ask you to make *me* a promise.

MATER

It's my pet avocation, child.

MARY

Don't call me "child"; it's ridiculous. You're just a spoilt one yourself. Please listen. I'm ashamed to have any acquaintance with Mr. Cullen. Rudolf doesn't know I went to that dinner party. Michael's forgotten it. Now promise me, mother, you will never tell either one of them that I've met Mr. Cullen.

MATER

MATER

[*Crossing herself solemnly.*]

Never — never — never !

MARY

[*Goes impetuously and kisses her.*]

I forgive you. Now do behave !

[*She hurries off, left.*]

MATER

[*Affectionately.*]

Twins! twins!

[*She laughs to herself; then, as a shade passes over her face, turns slowly and walks toward the piano-seat, pausing an instant to glance up at the portrait.*]

Michael dear !

[*She sits at the piano, touches the keys and sings.*]

Long ago, in the young moonlight,
 I lost my heart to a hero;
 Strong and tender and stern and right,
 Darker than night,
 And terribler than Nero.
 Heigh, but he was dear, O!

And there, to bind our fellowship,
 I laughed at him; and a moment after,
 I laughed again till he bit his lip;
 For the test of love is laughter.

[*As she sings on, the door-bell rings below, unheard by her.*]

“ Lord and master, look up ! ” I cried ;
 “ I wreathe your brow with a laurel !
 Gloom and wisdom and right and pride —
 Cast them aside,
 And kiss, and cure our quarrel.
 Never mind the moral ! ”

Alas ! with strange and saddened eyes
 He looked on me ; and my mirth grew dafter,
 To feel the flush of his dark surprise ;
 For the zest of love is laughter.

[*While she continues, there comes up the stairway into the hall a handsome man of early middle age. He enters, unnoticed by her ; softly approaches — smiling slightly — until he stands behind the piano-seat.*]

Long ago, in the old moonlight,
 I lost my hero and lover ;
 Strong and tender and stern and right,
 Never shall night
 Nor day his brow uncover.
 Ah, my heart, that is over !

Yet still, for joy of the fellowship
 That bound us both through the years long after,
 I laugh to think how he bit his lip ;
 For the test of love —
 And the best of love — is laughter.

[*Finishing, Mater remains sitting in a reverie. Behind her, the man lightly touches the flowers on her hair.*]

THE MAN

Was it a fragrance, or a song?

MATER

[Springing up, steps back in startled reserve.]

Mr. Cullen!

CULLEN

The maid told me to walk up, Miss Dean. I had no right to listen, but the daffodils made me bold.

MATER

Oh, the daffodils!

CULLEN

[Smiling.]

You see,

“I wandered lonely as a cloud —
When all at once” —

It is gracious of you to wear them — and like that.

MATER

I didn't know they taught Wordsworth in the legislature.

CULLEN

You are fond of yellow?

MATER

Very; it's so becoming.

CULLEN

To pure gold!

MATER

Oh, you've come to talk *business!*

CULLEN

With your brother, Miss Dean.

MATER

[*Starting.*]

My brother? — To be sure!

CULLEN

[*Taking from his pocket a large envelope.*]

I have brought him some papers — memoranda in regard to the election.

MATER

I remember now. — How soon is he to be elected?

CULLEN

[*Smiling.*]

Well, that may depend upon how soon he is willing to receive these papers.

MATER

How nice of you! Then it's all settled.

CULLEN

I think we may have to confer — first.

MATER

Don't trouble, I'll hand them to him.

MATER

CULLEN

I'm afraid he might not accept them — without explanation.

MATER

[*Cordially.*]

Mightn't *I* explain that you'd like him to?

CULLEN

My dear Miss Dean, you are delightfully *apropos*. I really think you might. The whole matter, you see, is comprised in — in what one might call, in politics or philosophy, the point of view.

MATER

Yes, I've heard him mention that phrase, very earnestly.

CULLEN

[*Twinkling.*]

Have you! That doesn't sound promising.

MATER

Really? Why, what are the papers?

CULLEN

Let me be perfectly clear. The daughter of a Senator will doubtless understand. They are pledges from certain powerful quarters — quite informal pledges — of votes for your brother's election, *provided* he can see his way in assisting the campaign fund to the extent, say, of four thousand dollars. En-

tirely, of course, for necessary expenses. A simple business proposition, as you see. Do you catch the — the point of view?

MATER

Yes, I think, as you say, I *catch*.

CULLEN

[*Laughing.*]

Did I say “catch”? How unnecessary! Well, and do you think you can persuade your brother to — also to —

MATER

No, I’m certain he would *muff*.

[*Confidentially.*]

You see he’s much younger than I.

[*Cullen lifts his eyebrows.*]

And he’s had as yet so little knowledge of men and real life from the practical — what do you call it? — point of view.

CULLEN

On my word!

MATER

And besides that

[*With maternal confidingness.*]

— he’s so tired! You’ve no idea what insomnia! — We must be extremely careful not to let him think too hard. So, you see, I’m sure we had better not mention the papers to him at all.

MATER

CULLEN

[*Turning toward the hall.*]

That's a pity. I was looking forward so much to his becoming my colleague in the legislature.

MATER

[*Following.*]

Oh, you needn't let anything interfere with that.

CULLEN

[*Whose eyes have constantly watched Mater with fascination.*]

These papers, believe me, are the obstacles, not I.

MATER

I have it, then! Why not tear them up and stay to lunch?

CULLEN

[*With mingled ardor and grandiloquence.*]

Do *you* say that? You? — Dear Miss Dean, say it once more, and I will tear these to shreds and throw them into oblivion.

MATER

[*Catching her breath.*]

Gracious!

CULLEN

[*Checking himself.*]

You see, these represent, now, a matter of business between business men; but if, instead, all this were — may I say it, dear Miss Dean — were in one family —

MATER

[*Playing with the hand-glass on the table.*]

Dear me!

CULLEN

Between brothers —

MATER

Brothers!

[*Her mouth twitching, she turns the glass and glances at her reflection.*]

That *is* an idea.

CULLEN

Then, you see, the case would be utterly changed.

MATER

[*Glancing up.*]

Oh, utterly!

CULLEN

Young Dean — that is, Michael — and I would then have but one interest and ambition. And of course there would be no need for even mentioning business between us.

MATER

Of course not. I hadn't thought of that before — really!

CULLEN

[*Smiling enthralled.*]

But you'll think of it now, and — invite me to lunch again?

[*Looking at her, he lifts the large envelope, about to tear it. She stops him with a gesture.*]

MATER

MATER

Just a minute! Mayn't I see them?

[*Cullen shakes his head.*]

And you are absolutely sure that Michael's election depends on the papers in that envelope?

CULLEN

On pledges which they informally stand for — absolutely.

MATER

[*Turning away her head to hide a swift frown of perplexity, pauses, lifts the hand-glass again, smiles wickedly, crosses herself, turns backward her face to the right, looks at Cullen and the envelope, and reaches back (right) her left hand across her shoulder.*]

Please! Over my right shoulder! Just for luck?

CULLEN

[*Again shaking his head, puts the envelope inside his coat.*]

Not these; but something else, if you will let me.

[*He fumbles in his outer side pocket.*]

May I ask what you are smiling about?

MATER

May I ask you the same?

CULLEN

[*Producing from his pocket a tiny box, and offering it.*]

It's such a little thing —

MATER

[*Meeting his glance.*]

To save a nation!

[*Taking the box.*]So this is the *alternative*?

CULLEN

And in presenting it, may I beseech you to be unequivocal—and ask me to lunch again?

MATER

Unequivocally, this is called — “putting the question,” isn’t it?

CULLEN

[*Ardently.*]

Need you ask?

MATER

[*Drawing back a little.*]

Well, you see it’s so long — since the last time, I’m afraid I’ve grown rusty.

CULLEN

Gold is cruel, but it never rusts. Dearest young lady, in the gleam of your hair, your wreath, your smile, you are a book of little ironies bound in gold, and in spite of being your butt, my heart “dances with the daffodils.”

MATER

[*Opening the box.*]

Why, it’s a thimble!

MATER

CULLEN

And gold to match !

MATER

[*Delightedly.*]

My dear Mr. Cullen, it's the booby prize — the one we drew for guessing riddles at that dinner party.

CULLEN

You and I.

MATER

Yes, we were partners. It fits beautifully. What glory for Michael's socks !

CULLEN

I told you I would have it inscribed.

MATER

How good of you to remember !

CULLEN

How *could* I forget ? Can you read the inscription ?

MATER

[*Examining the thimble.*]

M. D. & A. C. Partners.

How interesting ! Is this one of the riddles — we *didn't* guess ?

CULLEN

The letters, of course, stand for you and me.

Us ?

MATER

The initials —

CULLEN

MATER

Wait. You mustn't tell. Let me guess: M. D. — Marvellous Deep, that's me ; & A. C. — Awfully Clever, that's you. Right ?

CULLEN

Wrong ! You've inverted us.

MATER

Three more guesses !

[She proceeds to point her index finger, first at herself and then at Cullen, in repetition.]

M. D., Mend Darns & A. C., Aid Charity.

Money Deposited & Accounts Credited.

Make Declarations & Accept Consequences.

Have I won ?

CULLEN

Lost ! You pointed the wrong way.

[Taking from her the thimble.]

Matilda Dean, M. D. —

MATER

Doctor of Matrimony !

CULLEN

& A. C., Arthur Cullen —

MATER

MATER

Author of Compliments!

[She courtesies, he bows and both laugh.]

CULLEN

You have saved the day — and the prize. Now you must wear it.

MATER

[Holding out her right hand.]

On my darning-finger?

CULLEN

No; the left hand — on the ring-finger.

[Mater puts out her left hand, but draws it back hastily behind her. In the same moment, Cullen's smile dies away.]

I beg pardon.

[He looks at her quizzically.]

MATER

[Quickly.]

Oh, not at all.

[After a pause.]

You — you want to see it?

CULLEN

I believe I — caught a glimpse.

MATER

[Hesitatingly, brings her left hand forward, revealing a ring on the ring-finger.]

It's quite plain.

CULLEN

Quite — plain gold.

MATER

You don't — mind, do you?

CULLEN

Mind? I?

MATER

I mean, because of the finger. You see, it's a wedding-ring.

CULLEN

I see.

MATER

You see, it belonged to the first Mrs. Dean — Mrs. Senator Dean.

CULLEN

Oh! — Thank you.

MATER

You see, Michael's mother — well, of course, I can never feel quite the same sentiment toward her — as *he* does. And so, my own mother not being living — you understand —

CULLEN

Oh, entirely.

MATER

So, you see, I wear her ring — the *first* Mrs. Dean's ring — from a kind of sentiment — a very natural kind of sentiment, I think.

MATER

Absolutely.

CULLEN

You think so ?

MATER

[*Naïvely.*]

Of course.

CULLEN

You're relieved?

MATER
[*Anxiously.*]

Enormously, Miss Dean.

CULLEN

So am I!

MATER
[*Drawing a deep breath.*]

Really though, you gave me a bad minute.

CULLEN

I'm so glad.

MATER
[*Absently.*]

I'm afraid you are wicked.

CULLEN

[*Smiling.*]

I am, I am!

MATER

CULLEN

I had supposed that Michael Dean—but I knew nothing about it. I knew nothing, you see, of his

family, till that happy riddle party, when I met you ; the only time till now. I didn't know, of course, that you and he are children of different mothers.

MATER

[*With great earnestness.*]

Oh, but we are — honestly we are! — What makes you look at me like that ?

CULLEN

I was taking *my* turn.

MATER

At what ?

CULLEN

Miss Matilda Dean : her Marvellous Deepness.

MATER

Oh, but surely Arthur Cullen, Esquire, his Awfully Cleverness can decipher that.

CULLEN

Will you answer me downright one thing ?

MATER

Ask it first.

CULLEN

Miss Dean, have you never given your heart to a man ?

MATER

MATER

Downright — that's difficult to answer. Would you call yourself a man, Mr. Cullen?

CULLEN

[*Fervently.*]

Do you mean —

MATER

What I ask? — Of course.

CULLEN

[*Constraining himself.*]

Well, for argument, yes; give me the benefit. What, then, is your answer?

MATER

Then my answer is — no.

CULLEN

Never?

MATER

With one limitation. To speak downright of my heart, — long ago I gave it to a dragon.

CULLEN

A dragon!

MATER

A wonderful black swan, made of fire and tempest and tenderness. And he devoured it in flames.

CULLEN

[*With growing emotion.*]

And where, may I ask, does this fiery swan-dragon live?

MATER

[*Quietly.*]

He is dead.

CULLEN

Fortunate for him, Miss Dean, or I should have been tempted to become his Saint George.

MATER

[*Smiling faintly.*]

Fortunate for *you*, Mr. Cullen.

CULLEN

O undecipherable lady! You are just muddling my head with your mythology. Let it go!

[*Lifting the thimble.*]

I haven't a spark of curiosity; I don't care a hang where you may have hung your heart before, so long as you don't drive me to the gallows-tree by refusing me this thimbleful of hope.

MATER

Drive you where?

CULLEN

To corruption, Miss Dean, — to the campaign fund; and your brother to despair.

MATER

My — [*checking herself.*] Michael to despair? If I refuse this thimble?

CULLEN

Precisely. He will lose his election, and I shall lose my morals. Think, dear Miss Dean, think of the double salvation that lies in your power.

[*Holding out the thimble, he steps toward her.*]

MATER

Do you mean, Mr. Cullen, that you would intimidate me with a thimble?

CULLEN

Intimidate! — Ah, there you forget again. Are we not both good Hegelians? Intimidation and love are but points of view.

MATER

Mr. Cullen, you are positively medicinal! If only I had you always in the house, I'd consult no more specialists. I'd drop you every morning, by lumps, in Michael's coffee.

[*The voice of Michael calls from outside, "Mater!" She starts for the door, lower left.*]

Goodness! He wants me now. I must tell him you're here.

CULLEN

[*Holding it out.*]

The thimble.

MATER

What *sha!* I do?[*The voice sounds again impatiently.*]

CULLEN

What's that he called you?

MATER

Me? That? Oh, "Mater!"—Short for Matilda, you know. He always called me that as a little boy, and the Senator used to encourage him. He thought it sounded so pretty and maternal. So now, you see, it's grown habitual with him.

[*With anxiety but assumed spontaneity.*]

—Do you like it?

CULLEN

Why, it's quite charming, but quite inappropriate.

MATER

[*Surprised and ruffled.*]

Nonsense! I don't agree with you.

[*She starts for the door again.*]

CULLEN

Miss Dean—the thimble.

MATER

[*Pausing—her matronly feelings still piqued.*]

It's very unfriendly of you. If you think me a seminary miss—

MATER

CULLEN

But, dear young lady, I *must* remind you—

MATER

[*Tartly.*]

Oh, I don't mean the thimble.

CULLEN

Won't you take it before —

MATER

[*Taking it quickly.*]

Of course I'll take it — and hide it. That's part of the game, you know.

[*She puts it in her girdle.*]

CULLEN

Remember! That means hope.

MATER

Not in the least, — not till I wear it.

CULLEN

Don't forget! Whatever service in the world I can do for your brother —

MATER

But I did forget. Those campaign clippings!

[*She goes toward the table.*]

He will gobble me up.

CULLEN

I beg of you. Can I be of any possible use?

MATER

Why, of course you can. Sit down and paste these in quickly.

[*He sits at the table by the scrap-book.*]

These here, those there. Exactly like that—parallel. Exactly, mind! No; you'll have to sit *square* to do it.

[*Adjusting him.*]

So! Like that. Now, *don't move* from that angle till I come back and criticise. If you do—

CULLEN

[*Raising his hand, as in oath-taking.*]

Geometrical lady, I will keep parallel—though I petrify!

[*As she is going, she places, rather conspicuously, one of the clippings beside him; then hurries away. Cullen calls after her.*]

And the thimble?

MATER

[*At the door.*]

If ever you see it on my darning-finger, you may have *hope*.

[*Exit, in low-voiced laughter.*]

CULLEN

[*Looks after her.*]

Hope, bewitching Hope!

[*He turns to the scrap-book, takes paste brush and shears and lifting the clipping which Mater has laid down, glances at it more closely, whistles a soft whistle and reads.*]

“A striking feature of the present campaign has been the nomination of that young and idealistic radical, Michael Dean, son of the late lamented Senator. Whatever opinions may be held in regard to his epoch-making work ‘Common Sense and the Common Weal,’ it is pleasant, at least, to contrast the straightforward promise of this young man with the compromising accomplishment of the majority of our legislators; notably with the activity of the Honorable Arthur Cullen, whose record of public activity so far has consisted in playing astutely that game of so-called ‘practical’ politics, which is simply another name for private enterprise.”

[*Looking toward the door, lower left.*]

Well, of all artistic deviltry —!

MICHAEL

[*His voice heard outside.*]

No, you will wait, please. I wish to see him alone.

[*Cullen closes the scrap-book hastily. MICHAEL enters and pauses with aloofness. Cullen starts to rise, but sits again suddenly, in his former pose of angular rigidity.*]

MICHAEL

Good morning, Mr. Cullen.

CULLEN

Good morning, Dean.

MICHAEL

We have already conversed by telephone.

CULLEN

Yes; very pleasant to hear your voice. How are you?

MICHAEL

Very curious.

CULLEN

Eh? What's curious?

MICHAEL

I — to hear you explain.

CULLEN

Oh, of course! Beg pardon, I forgot. The fact is, I've an ugly touch of sciatica, and that prevents me.

[*He contorts his face for an instant.*]

MICHAEL

Prevents you from explaining?

CULLEN

No, my dear fellow, from rising. I trust I have explained. It comes and goes — by fits, you know.

MICHAEL

And did you come in this fit to consult me as a doctor?

CULLEN

No, don't worry; I've seen the doctor already. I'm prescribed for. Just Hope! And *no moving*, till Hope returns.

[*Cullen, still sitting rigid, glances uncomfortably but humorously toward the door, left. Michael begins to pace with nervous strides.*]

MICHAEL

Mr. Cullen, this afternoon I have a public speech to make. My time is brief. You will kindly leave these prevarications and explain your business.

CULLEN

[*His eyes constantly seeking the door.*]

There's really no great hurry.

[*Taking from his pocket the large envelope.*]

I have brought with me some memoranda, forecasts of your election, which I should be glad to hand you, in the event —

MICHAEL

In the event of my handing you four thousand dollars.

CULLEN

Toward the campaign expenses.

MICHAEL

Thanks, sir; but you are old fashioned. Since your good old days, you forget that the people have been to school — politically. The A B C of public morality forbids any candidate to provide expenses for his own campaign.

CULLEN

My dear Dean, those of us who never get beyond their A B C's may have to sit always in the back benches.

MICHAEL

And those of us who *forget* their A B C's may have to be sent even farther back.

CULLEN

[*With a grimace.*]

The devil! — Pardon my sciatica.

MICHAEL

[*Earnestly.*]

Are you really in pain?

CULLEN

A touch, a mere touch.

[*Pocketing the envelope again.*]

Let's change the subject. I have an alternative to propose.

MATER

MICHAEL

So you mentioned.

CULLEN

A pleasanter solution to all this. Your sister —

MICHAEL

My sister! What has she to do with all this?

CULLEN

It occurred to me when I first met her —

MICHAEL

When? I didn't know you had ever met.

CULLEN

Heaven forgive you, then! You introduced me yourself at the Robinsons' dinner.

MICHAEL

Did I? I don't remember. — Well, the alternative?

CULLEN

My dear Dean, you and I are in politics — probably for keeps. I possess large influence already; you *may* possess it sometime. You are, of course, a genius, but —

MICHAEL

Skip that.

CULLEN

In short, you yourself have prompted my suggestion. In your incomparable book, you will re-

member, you point out that self-interest is the most powerful motive of humanity, and the logical one to employ for attaining the ends of the common weal.

MICHAEL

In brief, what's your proposition?

CULLEN

Simply this: In our common weal, we can be friends or enemies. *For* our common weal, therefore, let self-interest make us friends. Now it so happens that I am unmarried, and you have a sister —

MICHAEL

Get up!

CULLEN

[*Still seated.*]

What's the row?

MICHAEL

Take yourself out of here!

CULLEN

[*In smiling consternation.*]

I wish I might, but Hope — bewitching Hope — has deserted me.

MICHAEL

Get out of that chair, and get out of this house!

CULLEN

[*Without rising, gesticulates rigidly, opens the scrap-book, peers in, and dips the paste brush wildly.*]

Great heaven! They're not parallel!

MATER

MICHAEL

[About to seize him]

Thundering hell, I say —

MATER

[Bursting in.]

Found! Found!

CULLEN

[Leaping precipitously from his chair.]

Praise God!

MATER

[Raising her right hand.]

Behold it!

CULLEN

[Rapturously.]

On the darning-finger!

MICHAEL

[Glowering at Cullen.]

What game are you at now?

MATER

Hide the thimble! I've found it. See!

MICHAEL

[To Mater.]

Have you run mad?

MATER

*[To Cullen, seating herself.]*Now *I* sit and *you're* it!

CULLEN

[*Gazing at Mater's finger.*]Now I'm *it* indeed, — *it* forever!

MICHAEL

This is beyond me.

CULLEN

I don't wonder, Dean. You see, it accounts for my extraordinary sitting capacity.

MICHAEL

I see — nothing.

MATER

Of course you do! We're just playing.

MICHAEL

Playing what, in God's name? Oh, less smiles! less smiles!

CULLEN

My dear fellow, let me now *really* explain. Forgive me. All this was a little device of my own to test you.

MICHAEL

Test — *me!*

CULLEN

Need I say that the device was superfluous? I congratulate you and your constituents in the election. You have withstood a double temptation, like the upright man you are.

[*Taking out the large envelope.*]

Dean, I'm proud of you, and I take great pleasure in handing you these pledges—with no conditions whatsoever.

MICHAEL

But the four thousand—

CULLEN

Mere talk.

MICHAEL

And the alternative?

CULLEN

Utter nonsense.

MICHAEL

[*Taking the envelope mechanically.*]

Very wonderful! Very incredible! Mater, what do you know of all this?

MATER

You have told me frequently, Michael, how little I know of politics.

MICHAEL

Have you done what is right unscrupulously?

MATER

Oh, quite unscrupulously.

MICHAEL

And remembered your promise?

MATER

Of course I've remembered it.

MICHAEL

Well, sir, I accept these pledges—with no conditions. I ask pardon for my excitement, but I ask no pardon for continuing to distrust you. And until you can provide me with some less fantastic reason for your sudden change of attitude than this sudden relief from sciatica, I will ask you to leave this house immediately and permanently.

[*Crossing to the door, lower left, Michael—about to go out—pauses a moment on the threshold.*]

CULLEN

Of course, Dean, I will take my leave. But I feel sure that when you come to look at my sciatica from a different point of view—

MICHAEL

[*Exploding.*]

Point of view again! Points of view, sir, are points of the devil's horns. They sprout as fast as they moult. Your practical politician wears them for a helmet in the arena, and as fast as his antagonist blunts one, the tip o' t'other sharpens and gleams in his eyebrow.

[*Thundering.*]

When the Cimmerian Pluto, sir, vacated his throne to a sophist—

MATER

[*Who has watched Michael with a glow of maternal admiration, now no longer containing herself, claps her hands with delight.*]

Isn't he a poet! Dear Mr. Cullen, isn't he a poet?

MICHAEL

[Glaring at Mater and Cullen, who burst simultaneously into applause and laughter.]

Damnation!

[He rushes out, slamming the door.]

ACT II

ACT II

A few days later. Afternoon.

The curtains of the window are almost closed, admitting only a slit of light. The hallway curtains are also drawn. On the table is an ironing-board; beneath it, a tablecloth hangs to the floor; upon it, a pressing-iron, and a pair of black trousers. On the front edge of the table, a glass, half filled with a milky liquid, stands on a silver tray, on which is also a teaspoon. Near by, a small pitcher. In various parts of the room are vases filled with yellow flowers.

On the divan (his head toward the audience) lies MICHAEL, with a dark green silk neckerchief laid over his eyes. Owing to the piled-up pillows and the shawl which covers him, his form is hardly discernible. A tall folding-screen shuts off the divan partly from the rest of the room, obstructing the meagre light that comes from the window. Near the head of the divan, seated beside the pillows, MATER is stroking Michael's brow and hair with the lightest of touches. In her dress are fastened yellow cowslips.

MATER

[*Singing.*]

Sleep, dearie, sleep!

I saw the first star peep.

As soon as the solemn day is done,

The stars and dreams begin their fun.

Dearie boy,
Weary boy, sleep!

[*Ceasing, she sits motionless for a moment, watching his breathing; then she rises quietly, tiptoes round the screen to the table, lifts the pressing-iron, tests its heat with a moistened finger, spreads out the trousers and begins to press them.*

Michael stirs and moans. Mater stops and looks anxiously toward him; begins then softly to sing again, resuming her work as she does so.]

Hush thee, my bonny, thy cradle is green,
Father's a nobleman, mother's a queen.

[*Enter from the hall MARY, wearing her hat. This she takes off, goes to the screen, looks at Michael and speaks low and feelingly.*]

MARY

How long has he been asleep?

MATER

[*Answering in a like undertone.*]

Half an hour. His first day-nap for a fortnight. He's been over-working so terribly. Thank God election day is here at last!

MARY

What did the doctor say?

MATER

He fears nervous prostration. Said everything would depend on to-day — on whether he's elected.

MARY

[*Anxiously.*]

Everything! How?

MATER

My dear, he said if Michael should be beaten, disappointed now in his ambition, he might be "down and out for always—an invalid." Those were his very words.

MARY

Don't speak them. Poor boy! I was sure that rally last night would be the last straw. It did up even me. And now I've been watching round the polls all morning—I'm a wreck!

MATER

[*With affectionate banter.*]

Dear Mollykins! You do look rather green in the gills.

MARY

[*Irritated.*]

I don't either.—How absurd of you, mother, to be doing this here!

MATER

Ironing?

MARY

Trousers!

MATER

I hope I may scratch for my own chick and child, and still keep a wing over him.

MARY

Why didn't he send for the tailor?

MATER

Hush!

[*Beckoning Mary farther from the screen.*]

So he did! And do you think I would allow a tailor with nine undisinfected children to carry off my boy's trousers, and he lying helpless? Gracious, girl! To put your legs into measles-germs and chicken-pox — I hope *you'll* never do such things.

MARY

I wish *you* would never *think* such things! And I wish you wouldn't *wear* such things.

MATER

Cowslips? I love cowslips.

MARY

Well, if that Mr. Cullen is such a ninny as to send me yellow flowers every day —

MATER

Oh, but he doesn't. He sends them to *me* — Miss Dean, you know.

MARY

Then you ought to be all the more ashamed to wear them. You bowed to him in the Park yesterday. Really, if you're not more careful, he may misunderstand it.

MATER

I devoutly hope he will.

MARY

Now, what do you mean by that?

MATER

Who knows, my dear? He's so devoted — and he might be so useful

[Glancing toward the divan.]

to Michael boy. — Would it surprise you?

MARY

[With wide eyes.]

What?

MATER

[Softly shaking her.]

Stupid! Don't you see? I have half a mind to —

MARY

To what?

MATER

Run for the legislature myself.

[At Mary's expression of dense disgust, she breaks into laughter, which she instantly stifles.]

MARY

Of all preposterous things —

MATER

MATER

But fascinating, my dear! It's a fascinating art.

MARY

An art!

MATER

This acting. It's such fun, and so ticklish! It's like first skating — there are so many ways to trip and see stars. If you make a false entrance, miss a cue or take a wrong one, lose track of *who* you are, or forget how to improvise — *bing!* lights out; down comes the curtain and out goes your reputation. Ah, but it's rare sport while it lasts. We must take to the stage, Mary, you and I.

MARY

I shall take to my bed, mother, directly. I'm worn out listening to speeches.

MATER

Now that's sensible; have a good nap.

MARY

I have just written this letter to Rüdolf.

[*Handing it.*]

Give it to him when he calls.

[*Going.*]

Dear old Rüdolfo! He always *does* call, though I never see him. — Read it if you like.

MATER

May I?

MARY

And wake me up, mind, just as soon as the first returns come in. There ought to be some "Extras" out before dark.

[*Yawning wearily.*]

Oh, me for the sand-man!

MATER

Sleep tight.

[*Exit MARY, lower left.*]

[*Mater returns to the divan, gazes anxiously at Michael, softly adjusts a pillow, goes to the bay-window, where she draws the curtains to a narrower slit, by the light of which she stands, reading Mary's letter with flitting smiles. From the hall, RUDOLF enters. He wears his overcoat and holds his hat. Dazed for a moment by the darkened room, he is approached — before he sees her — by Mater, who claps her hand over his lips, points to the divan and draws him to the farther corner of the room.*]

Softly — or your life!

RUDOLF

How is she?

MATER

He, you mean. He's worse. Will he be elected?

RUDOLF

Sure thing! Great weather for the votes.

MATER

How much longer to wait?

MATER

RUDOLF

The polls close at six. —

[*With a gasp, dropping his hat on the piano.*]

Well, I'll be ice-cream-soda'd!

MATER

[*With a gesture of silence.*]

You'll wake him. What's the matter?

RUDOLF¹

[*Pointing at Mater's yoke.*]

Those! — Cowslips, ain't they?

MATER

Yes.

RUDOLF

That cinches it. I'm damned if I stand it any longer. No, Mater, there's no use joshing me; you got those from Mary, and she got 'em from that grafter.

MATER

Quiet!

RUDOLF

I've tracked him, I tell you, every day, and every day to that same damn florist's store. — Yellow,² every time! Daffodils, primroses, cowslips, yellow lilies, yellow daisies, yellow roses — Oh, he's a genuine yellow dog!

¹ The dialogue which follows between them is carried on in low tones, rising at times on Rudolf's part to a higher key, at which times — on his own or Mater's initiative — he checks himself abruptly, and lowers his voice again.

² Rudolf pronounces this as if it were *yuller*.

MATER

[*Laughing low.*]

[Thoroughbred yellow!]

RUDOLF

And I tracked the messenger boy here to the front door. Every morning he rung the bell. I wish I'd wrung his neck! "For Miss Dean," says he. For Miss Dean!

MATER

Well, you see she doesn't wear them herself.

RUDOLF

How do *I* know? You may be trying to let me down easy. *She* won't see me. Just because I kissed her! I can't swallow it.

MATER

Silly! She's only teasing.

RUDOLF

Teasing! Well, I tell her straight, then, if she thinks she can shuffle me into the tricks of that blackleg—

MATER

[*Holding up the letter.*]

What will you give for this?

RUDOLF

[*Snatching it.*]

From Mary! Bless her heart!

[*He rushes with it to the curtains and reads. As he does so the door-bell rings. Mater crosses to the hallway curtains, opens them a little, listens, closes them quickly and hastens to Rudolf.*]

MATER

I want you to do something for me. °

RUDOLF

[*With joyous explosion.*]

Mater! She's a cracker-jack. Read it.

[*He thrusts the letter into her hands.*]

She tells me to come round right after midnight and she'll make up. Election day will be over then, you know.

MATER

What did I tell you?

[*Laying the letter on the table.*]

Now, what will you do for *me*?

RUDOLF

Anything! Pickle myself!

[*Takes up the pressing-iron.*]

MATER

Well, then, { since you're in such a hurry —

RUDOLF

Who said that I —

MATER

[*Edging him toward the door, upper left.*]

Go out by the back way and give this iron to Nellie, the cook, and tell her please —

RUDOLF

But, hold on—

MATER

Here's your hat. Tell her to put it on the stove and heat it immediately. Be quick.

[*Standing in the doorway, Rudolf—his Derby hat in one hand, the iron in the other—extends his arms. Simultaneously, the hallway curtains part quietly and CULLEN enters, sees, hears, and exits precipitously, unseen.*]

RUDOLF

Mater, you're a darling! I'd like to give you a hug. Can I?

MATER

Quoth the Big-sized Bear to Goldy-locks!

[*She hugs him playfully, growling in bear-fashion; then pushes him out.*]

Now lively, Rudolf, give it to the cook.

RUDOLF

[*Outside.*]

See you at midnight.

[*Mater closes the door, and is going toward the screen, when CULLEN reënters from the hall. Mater points warningly toward the divan.*]

MATER

MATER

Asleep! — You oughtn't to have dared.

CULLEN

You got my note with the flowers?

MATER

Yellow — how nice of you to remember! But you know *he* has forbidden you the house. If he should wake —

CULLEN

Would the next room —?

MATER

Oh, I mustn't leave him. You'd better come to-morrow.

CULLEN

[Slowly, with smiling suspiciousness.]

Mightn't that be too late?

MATER

Why?

CULLEN

May I glance again at your darning-finger?

[Mater shows it.]

And where, may I ask, is the —

MATER

It's hid, of course. — How queerly you smile!

Mater: 92

CULLEN

It's a queer day — election day.

MATER

[*With an obvious sigh of relief.*]

It will soon be over.

CULLEN

Yes, Miss Dean ; but it *isn't* over *yet*.

[*Looking at his watch.*]

It's not quite four o'clock. The ballots are counted at six.—Have you made our little announcement

[*Nodding.*]

— to him ?

MATER

[*Naively*]

Dear Mr. Cullen, he's *so* ill.

CULLEN

Dear Miss Dean, — may I call you *Mater* ?

MATER

[*Repressing a spring of laughter.*]

How gracious of you !

CULLEN

You're not playing with me ?

MATER

On my heart ! It's too good to be true. I was praying you would come to call me — that.

MATER

CULLEN

Like so many *other* friends of yours?

MATER

Oh, dear no! Only the family.

CULLEN

Only the family!

[*Glancing at the door where Rudolf lately went out.*]

So!

MATER

That is, except one, of course, who may *sometime*—

[*She pauses in sudden embarrassment.*]

CULLEN

[*Intensely.*]

May sometime?

MATER

[*Whispering quickly.*]

We're talking too much.

[*She hurries on tiptoe to the divan, motions silence to Cullen, turns her back on him, oblivious, and sings low beside Michael.*]

Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top,
 When the wind blows, the cradle will rock;
 When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
 And down will come baby, cradle and all.

[*Cullen, who listens captivated, moves impulsively toward her.*]

CULLEN

Dearest of women — Damn !

[Brushing past the table, he strikes the ironing-board and knocks off the tray, glass, and teaspoon from its edge. They clatter noisily on the floor. Michael starts from his sleep. Mater turns in consternation and whispers, with an agitated gesture.]

Go ! Go !

[Cullen ducks behind the table, the cloth of which conceals him. Michael sits up, with a startled look.]

MICHAEL

What's the matter ?

MATER

[Picking up the glass, etc.]

I was fixing your egg-nog, dear, and it spilled.

MICHAEL

[Testily.]

You shouldn't be so careless.

[He rises, pale and worn-looking, in his dressing-gown; rubs his eyes, and lays the dark silk neckerchief on the table.]

MATER

Does the light still hurt ?

MICHAEL

Yes.

MATER

Did tired boy have a nice sleep ?

MATER

MICHAEL

No, I dreamed.

MATER

A penny for a dream!

MICHAEL

I saw Cullen in this room again; I was sure I heard him talking.

MATER

[*Drawing away.*]

You were sure?

MICHAEL

Positive—in my nightmare! Mater, I have never understood that morning,—that hide-the-thimble nonsense. I was thinking—

MATER

But you mustn't think! The doctor said "No." Come upstairs and we'll rest again.

MICHAEL

[*Crossing with her toward the door, lower left.*]If you are hiding any thimble from *me*—

MATER

[*Appealingly.*]

Now, boy!

MICHAEL

I said *if*, Mater. Take care! Remember your promise. And remember, too, that never am I to set eyes on that hypocrite in this house again.

MATER

Never, dear,

[*With a twinkling glance toward the tablecloth.*]

if we can help it. So now come.] I've instructed
the maid that you cannot see *anybody* at all.

MICHAEL

Not till to-night.

[*With sudden melancholy.*]

To-night — Mater! What if the ballots go against
me?

MATER

But they can't! My funny-bone aches, and bones
are prophetic. — You are to be elected!

MICHAEL

I'm tired! — It's all the finger of fate, anyway.

MATER

Of course it is. And Fate wears a thimble.

MICHAEL

What's that?

MATER

Fate and I, my dear, are old cronies. So don't
worry. She has revealed to me her omens and they
are all auspicious. To-night's the new moon, and
whenever the moon is new —

MICHAEL

Nonsensical little noddle!

[*Holding her temples and looking in her eyes.*]

With all the doting, patient love it contains, I wouldn't swap it for a thousand moons chock-full of destiny. —

[*Raising his forefinger.*]

So long as it never fibs!

MATER

[*Uneasily moving to the door.*]

Now [we'll] come?

MICHAEL

No, Mater — not with me. I'm going to my room alone. I want to think of all that's coming — to-night.

MATER

[*With affectionate reproach.*]

But, dearie, —

MICHAEL

[*With a gesture of finality.*]

I want to be alone — utterly alone.

[*Exit.*]

MATER

[*Looking after him wistfully.*]

He mustn't say that.

CULLEN¹

[*Rising from behind the tablecloth.*]

Compliments, please! Didn't I take my medicine like a man?

¹ Throughout the ensuing scene between Cullen and Mater, the dialogue is to be so rendered by the actor and actress that beneath

MATER

[*Turns round with annoyance, which she represses, and looks at the floor.*]

You did indeed! And my rug will never recover from it. —

Dear, dear, what a spot! And it's sinking in.

[*Looking hastily round her.*]

Please fetch me something to —

[*He offers his handkerchief.*]

Oh, thanks!

[*She stoops down to wipe up the egg-nog.*]

CULLEN

Don't.

[*Raising her and kneeling down himself.*]

Allow me.

MATER

[*Handing him the small pitcher.*]

Here's some water. Rub hard. — You need more light.

[*She goes to the window curtains and throws them back, letting in a rush of sunshine.*]

the humorous outward badinage of both, the more serious feelings of each are made evident: On Mater's part, her absent-minded thoughts of Michael, her earnest desire to play her part skilfully and her fears lest Cullen shall suspect her; on Cullen's part, a serious suspicion that Mater is playing with him, and a real feeling of enamoration for her.

MATER

CULLEN

[*On his knees, mopping.*]

Permit me to certify that this is the first time a handkerchief of mine has ever been wet with spilt milk.

MATER

[*Flashing at him a look of relief.*]

I adore you for that!

[*Cullen gets to his feet, glowing.*]

For now I know I am saved. You *won't* cry, will you, when I do tell you —

CULLEN

[*Quickly, sobering.*]

Please! — Don't tell me. We mustn't spill any more — either of us. If we did, *you* might cry, dear Mater, and it mustn't come to that.

MATER

[*With badinage.*]

You're too delightful, but really —

CULLEN

Pardon me. I merely want to remark that if you imagine our little game of hide-the-thimble is over, you are fundamentally mistaken.

I repeat: It is now a little past four o'clock. The election ballots are counted at six. Your brother's warm sentiments toward me he has lately rehearsed with eloquence, so that, in estimating my chances

in this game, I realize that I must depend on your touching devotion to him and his future career; though, I trust deeply that some tokens of my own humble devotion —

[He holds out comically the dragged handkerchief.]

MATER

[In true consternation.]

Good heavens! Do you mean that the voters' ballots can really be juggled with?

CULLEN

There again! "Juggled" fails to hit the exact viewpoint. In advanced mathematics, dear young lady, there are two distinct divisions, known as Popular Arithmetic and Political Arithmetic. The former is theoretical; the latter, practical. According, for instance, to your theoretical arithmetic, one and one make two; whereas, according to my practical computation, —

[Looking hard at her.]

one and one must be made one, otherwise one more must be eliminated from politics.

MATER

[Dubiously.]

Before to-morrow?

CULLEN

Before six o'clock; say, five-thirty.

MATER

MATER

[*Beginning to clear off the table.*]

Let me reckon a little.

[*She looks about, absent-mindedly.*]

Your arm, please. Carefully!

[*Holding Michael's trousers by the creases, she lays them over Cullen's extended left arm.*]

CULLEN

[*Smiling.*]

Only think how practical I should always be!

MATER

I've forgotten where I hid it.

[*As she takes off the tablecloth to fold it, Mary's letter drops to the floor unnoticed.*]

CULLEN

If you should ever need a mop, for example, or a suit-hanger,

[*Mater tosses the folded cloth across his right shoulder.*]

or a clothes-rack —

MATER

[*With mental decision.*]

I remember now. It's in my work-basket.

[*Standing the ironing-board against Cullen.*]

Now, if you'll put that — over here.

[*Leading the way to the closet, which she opens.*]

Inside!

CULLEN

[*Laden with ironing-board, cloths and trousers, follows awkwardly.*]

Or an auto-domestic toting-machine —

[*He puts the things in the closet.*]

MATER

[*Seating herself at the table, takes from the work-basket some socks, a darning egg and the gold thimble.*]

The whole combination outfit delivered free of charge when I exhibit this thimble to Michael! As advertised! Is that the offer?

CULLEN

[*Observing the thimble with pleasure.*]

Ha! found again! — You will also, of course, interpret to him the inscription.

MATER

Before five-thirty?

CULLEN

[*Smiling shrewdly.*]

Call it five.

MATER

Do yours wear at the heel or the toe, Mr. Cullen?

CULLEN

May I beseech you to call me *Arthur*?

MATER

MATER

[*With decisiveness.*]

Not till five-thirty! —

[[*Humming as she darns.*]Wear at the heel,
Spend a good deal.Wear at the toe,
Spend as you go.[*Holding up the undarned sock.*]

Michael's great toe is invincible!]

CULLEN

Do you know, dear Mater, when I behold you like this, enshrined, so to speak, in the very soul of domesticity —

MATER

[*Darning.*]Wear at the ball,
Spend not at all.

CULLEN

And when just now I listened to you crooning that old Yankee tree-top lullaby —

MATER

There's the real national anthem for you!

CULLEN

I cannot resist thinking, after all, how aptly your pretty nickname may become you — sometime.

MATER

[*Singing.*]

“When the bough breaks the cradle will fall,
And down will come baby, cradle and all.” —

[*Glancing up.*]

It's so delightfully reassuring to the baby, don't
you think?

CULLEN

[*Dubiously.*]

That might depend on the baby.

MATER

[*Reassuringly.*]

But you see, he's bound to grow up a genuine
American humorist. He will have learned the na-
tional doxology in the maternal nest. Whenever the
wind blows, he'll be sure that *the worst is yet to come*,
and he'll compose himself accordingly, with smiles,
to slumber.

[*She glances up again quickly.*]

CULLEN

Was I smiling?

MATER

You should have been. Anyway, assumed a virtue,
you know; for I absolutely rely on your turning out a
humorist. May I depend on you?

CULLEN

[*Smiling.*]

I will try.

MATER

MATER

That's an immense relief.

CULLEN

Thank you for that faith in me. And to prove to you how fondly I aspire to deserve it, I will remind you that these are your brother's trousers, in which he may desire to incorporate himself sometime before the polls close.

MATER

Forgive me. I've been so busy patching the heel of Achilles, I forgot the arm of Paris. It must be tired.

[Putting down her darning things, rises.]

CULLEN

In the service of the golden Helen of Troy — never!
[She takes the trousers. With a grimace, he painfully relaxes his left arm.]

MATER

[Watching him.]

I see! It was over your left.

[Going with the trousers.]

I'll take these to my tree-top.

CULLEN

And I'll wait down here to watch how the wind blows.

MATER

[Wickedly.]

You needn't wait — if you hear a bough breaking!

[*Exit* MATER. Cullen smilingly seats himself by the table, gradually growing pensive. Mechanically he picks up a sheet of paper and an envelope from the floor at his feet, and is about to lay them upon the table. Glancing at the envelope, he brings it nearer to his eyes.]

CULLEN

{ "Rudolf Verbeck, Esquire": — Rudolf ! }

[*He gives a glance toward the door of Mater's exit; then looks at the sheet of paper.*]

"Dearest Rudolf,

[*Hesitating an instant, he reads on.*]

"I have treated you very badly these last few days. I am so sorry, but of course I had to keep my word. You know I told you I would not speak to you again till after election. Now the great day is almost over and Michael, let us pray, will be elected, to the discomfort of his enemies — especially that horrid Mr. Cullen. Then at last I shall be free again to welcome you. I shall sit up to-night till after twelve. If you will call in at midnight, I will make up for my long silence.

Your devoted

M. D."

[*Slowly folding up the sheet of paper, he puts both letter and envelope into his pocket.*]

M. D. — That horrid Mr. Cullen !

[*Enter, from the hallway, RUDOLF. He is out of breath, and hurries; but seeing Cullen, stops short.*]

MATER

RUDOLF

Jehosaphat!

CULLEN

Mr. Rudolf Verbeck?

RUDOLF

You!

CULLEN

My name, sir, is Cullen.

RUDOLF

And mine is Dennis! What in the devil — Oh, come! You haven't seen her?

CULLEN

You are referring perhaps to Miss Dean?

RUDOLF

Has she been here with you?

CULLEN

Ever since your abrupt departure, till a moment ago.

RUDOLF

You're-a liar!

CULLEN

Your vocabulary, sir, and your inference are both in error.

RUDOLF

I tell you, it wasn't fifteen minutes ago when I left that —

[*Pauses.*]

CULLEN

When you left that iron with the cook?

RUDOLF

What?—No! Mater wouldn't do that! *She* hustle me off so that you—my God! Why, I was just coming back to get that—

CULLEN

Probably you mean this letter you forgot.

[*Rudolf stares at the letter.*]

[It was my privilege to help in composing it.] It has, I think you'll agree, an Homeric style of pleasantry.—

“That horrid Mr. Cullen.”—Terse, but it tells the story.

RUDOLF

Wait a minute! You're a scientific old shark and you want to Fletcherize me. You swiped that letter, and you're sponging here where you don't belong. Miss Dean is engaged to me, and you know it. So clear out!

CULLEN

She has never shown you this?

[*Takes from the work-basket the thimble.*]

RUDOLF

What's that?

CULLEN

A little engagement gift of mine. She has just been wearing it and laid it down.

MATER

RUDOLF

More taffy! [*Taking it disdainfully.*]

CULLEN

Have you read the inscription?

RUDOLF

M. D. & A. C. Partners. — I'll be damned!

[*Reënter* MATER. *She starts hastily to withdraw, but is aware of Rudolf's eye upon her.*]

MATER

[*Coming in.*]

Gracious, Rudolf!

RUDOLF

So you're surprised to see me back!

MATER

I really didn't intend —

RUDOLF

You didn't intend I should see this honorable gentleman! Hustled me out of one door before he should come in t'other. — Well, I gave the iron to the cook all right.

MATER

[*Embarrassed.*]

Thank you.

RUDOLF

No, Mater! You don't mean to stand there and say it's true. Him! Him to win out, and me to get the go-by! And all those damn yellow flowers —

CULLEN

Mr. Verbeck forgot his letter.

[*Showing it.*]

MATER

[*Appalled.*]

Heaven be merciful!

RUDOLF

And you, Mater! You, of all people in the world, to contrive all this against me!

MATER

[*Looks from one to the other in chaotic perplexity; then raises her arms as in supplication.*]

Melpomene and Pulcinello, befriend me! Shades of Absurdity, hallow me with your wings! If ever scowling eyebrow, scornful nostril and suspicious lip have been the altars of my sacrifice, by these now I invoke you. Listen! I lift up your hollow reed of praise. Listen, and succor your priestess on this ultimate verge of —

[*She bursts into laughter.*]

Gentlemen, I give up. The situation is too perfect; it is beyond my technique — *Bien! c'est fini!* You must hear my confession.

RUDOLF

[*In utter gloom, glowers at Cullen, who wears a faint suspicious smile of discomfiture.*]

Thanks. I don't want to hear any more. I was always slow on a joke, but I guess I've caught the point of that letter all right.

[*Goes toward the hall, stops and looks back at Cullen.*]

Congratulations !

MATER

[*Uneasily.*]

You'll call in again about midnight ! We'll make a Welsh rarebit.

RUDOLF

Of me ? — Much obliged !

[*Exit down the stairs.*]

MATER

Poor, dear, dull boy ! — Do you think that kind runs to suicide ?

CULLEN

[*With coolness.*]

You, perhaps, are the better judge.

MATER

No, I'm sure his Dutch ancestors wouldn't let him. He *is* so dense, good soul. And to think that some day he'll be married. Lord, what children they will have ! Well, if they're born in Dutch pants and spectacles, I'll disown 'em.

CULLEN

[Twirling his watch-chain.]

I beg to remind you —

MATER

Don't do that; you'll get it full of kinks.

CULLEN

[Determinedly.]

To remind you once more —

MATER

There! How good of you! I knew I'd forgotten something else.

[Going to the book-shelves.]

These verses — I must read them to you.

CULLEN

To swap poets with you is a privilege. But now I really must remind you —

MATER

Listen! I am the poet.

[She brings a sheet of paper.]

It's mine.

CULLEN

Another song about a hero?

MATER

No; a campaign-hymn. It's a surprise for Michael. They're going to serenade him with it to-night — if he's elected.

CULLEN

I am happy you realize that he *must* be. Which reminds me —

MATER

Don't be so impatient. I'll read it to you directly. It's to be sung to old John Brown's tune.

I know Michael would love to have me read it to you — [*Keenly*] as a statesman.

[*She reads from the manuscript, gradually losing herself in it as she goes on, speaking the lines toward the end with fiery rhythm.*]

They have strewn the burning hearths of men with
darkness and with mire,
They have heaped the burning hearts of men with
ashes of desire,
Yet from out those hearts and hearths still leaps the
quick eternal fire

Whose flame is liberty.

For the freedom of the laborer is freedom from his
toil,
And freedom of the citizen is right to share the soil,
And the freedom of our country is the loosing of the
coil

That chokes posterity.

CULLEN

[*Clapping with polite applause.*]

The real Dean fire and storm-cloud; I never observed the family resemblance before.

MATER

[*Flashing upon him a look of quick scorn.*]

Listen! — I'm not through.

[*She reads on, merely glancing at the paper.*]

Let us who wage our devious wars, in fastness and in fen,
 March out and claim our birthright in the common sun
 again,
 And the battle of the beasts become the reasoning of
 men,
 And joy our harmony.

For the vote that makes a man free, bringing gladness
 to his bread,
 Is mightier than the mindless gun that leaves a million
 dead;
 And common sense is common joy, when all is sung
 and said,
 And common sense shall be!

[*Mater stands in a kind of martial brown-study, quite oblivious of Cullen's presence.*]

CULLEN

Enigma, I have solved thee.

MATER

Splendid boy! —

[*Eagerly.*]

Do you think it will please him?

[*With a sigh.*]

Of course, though, he hates all poetifying!

CULLEN

You are talking against time. But I warn you it's in vain. —

[*Pointing overhead.*]

When you carried the trousers up there, you did not tell your brother.

MATER

How do you know?

CULLEN

Because I've heard no breaking of furniture. Now, therefore, nothing less than painful necessity forces me to reveal to you — my universal reputation. [I'm an ugly character, — an unusually ugly political character. My dearest enemies will not deny that, in whatever venture has fallen to my hands, I have never failed to secure the goods. In my present venture, you — beloved lady — are the goods.]

MATER

Am I loot or merchandise?

CULLEN

I trust I am no usurper. *Quid pro quo* is my coat

of arms. In brief, here are my propositions and deductions : First, you love this Verbeck.

{ Of course! }

MATER

CULLEN

Second : you are engaged to marry him.

{ Really! }

MATER

CULLEN

Third : in the unimpeded course of human events, you would doubtless accompany him from altar to hearthstone } and rear up a disownable number of progeny in Dutch pants and spectacles. }

MATER

Upon my word — what corollaries! And can you compute the precise number by this magical mathematics?

CULLEN

Precisely! — An appropriate number.

MATER

Like the number of good votes in a ballot-box?

CULLEN

You follow me perfectly. Which brings me to the fourth and last proposition: You love also your brother.

Hence, we may cancel the first three items and

dispense with Verbeck altogether. For you love your brother and your brother loves his career. But his career depends on the calculations of Cullen. Now Cullen loves you. Therefore you love in Cullen your brother's career, which is the resultant of Cullen's love for you. By final deduction, therefore, you love Cullen.

MATER

Quod erat demonstrandum!

CULLEN

So much for the proof; now for the pudding!

[With business-like tone and directness.]

You will kindly inform your brother at once that you are no longer engaged to Mr. Verbeck, but to me. In plain United States, what do you say to that?

MATER

In plain United States, *that's a corker!*

CULLEN

Miss Dean, that won't do. I wish you good afternoon.

MATER

It isn't five-thirty.

CULLEN

Good-by.

[Without looking back, he passes into the hall and down the stairs. After he has disappeared, Mater stands still an instant, fingering nervously the silk neckerchief of Michael on the table. Then she goes to the stairway and calls softly.]

MATER

Mr. Cullen! Mr. Cullen!

[*A longer pause.*]

Arthur —

[*Under her breath.*]

Cullen, Esquire!

[*She hurries back into the room. Cullen leaps up the stairway and bursts across the hall into the room.*]

CULLEN

Dearest Mater!

MATER

[*Raising an admonishing hand.*]

Listen! When I cross myself, it's a sure sign.

CULLEN

Of what?

MATER

True blue. No fibbing. Now, look.

[*She slowly crosses herself.*]

I hereby renounce and cancel all intention, promise and desire which I have ever uttered, improvised or felt, to marry Rudolf Verbeck. Is that legal?

CULLEN

Desire! You even renounce your desire?

MATER

Perhaps that's an illegal word. I cannot renounce, I suppose, what I've never felt.

MATER

CULLEN

Goldlocks, you cannot fool me so, — not since I have read this letter.

[*Showing it.*]

But I believe your sign of true blue, and so I must believe you have utterly renounced him — for me.

MATER

[*Crossing herself again.*]

But I never wrote that letter.

CULLEN

[*Trying to stop her hand.*]

Don't! Don't! You're fibbing.

MATER

[*Crossing herself faster and faster.*]

If that's a fib, I'll marry you whenever you please.

CULLEN

But is that another?

MATER

Of course it is. For I'll never marry you.

[*As Cullen makes a desperate gesture, she speaks with rippling rapidity.*]

That is, of course, if it isn't, I will. — To-morrow, if you like.

CULLEN

Done! Fibbing or fibless, you are the most fascinating woman in the world, and fibbified or not, I adore the very sound and sight of you.

MATER

[*With a dreamy pause.*]

Poor dear Mr. Cullen — don't!

CULLEN

Don't *you*! Don't try to dash me now. I won't be dashed.

MATER

Who could have imagined it!

CULLEN

What, that I —

MATER

No. Me! I have a new symptom. It's awful! I'm beginning to feel sorry for you.

CULLEN

Pity, saith the poet, is the mother of love.

MATER

[*Quickly, with naïve relief.*]

That's it, I suppose. That makes me feel better already. Especially as you ought really — really to have some one to look after you.

MATER

CULLEN

[*With amorous cadence.*]And will not *you*?

MATER

[*Maternally.*]

Of course I will.

[*Looking intently just below his chin.*]And so, from the first, I want you to promise *me* something.

CULLEN

With all my heart.

MATER

No, your throat. Promise me not to send your collars to a Chinese laundry. So many of those coolies have tuberculosis, and you know how they — well, how they — you know, what the little Tritons on street fountains do.

CULLEN

[*Bursting into laughter.*]

Oh, wonderful!

MATER

[*Momentarily puffing her cheeks.*]Only not so prettily! *Promise me?*

CULLEN

Eternally!

[*Mater, darting to the piano, strikes the first chords of the song "Oh, Promise Me!" As Cullen springs to her side, she breaks off abruptly, and stares straight ahead of her.*]

MATER

Demon, demon, you're at it again!

CULLEN

Is it quite polite to call me *demon*?

MATER

Oh, not you.

Him! [*Pointing at the air in front of her.*]

CULLEN

Who?

MATER

[*Darkly.*]

My familiar slave and master.

CULLEN

The devil! [*Puzzled at her expression.*]

MATER

Exactly! All the bewitching ladies have little devils to serve them,

[*Sighing.*]

whom they also serve. So do the great sages. Socrates had one; *you* remember.

CULLEN

Is that a guess at my age?

MATER

Now *my* demon — Do you want to know what he's like?

CULLEN

I *must* know,

MATER

Usually he's a faun and on tiptoe he stands about

[*Measuring about an inch with her fingers.*]

so high, though sometimes he shoots up so tall that he shakes the stars from his curls. He's all kinds of artists and philosophers. First, a musician; he has composed a *Symphonie Comique*, in which he plays himself; and whenever the tender violins grow melancholy, he bleats on his droll bassoon — so nearly off the key, that it gives you shivers of fun to hear his new-found harmony. Next, a painter; he has a color-box called Paradox, with brushes of lamb's wool, and with these he will retouch a middle-aged Mamma to pass for a *débutante* in the eyes of a lover. Then he's a biologist; he puts fleas in men's ears, which they can never scratch out; and bees in their bonnets, that don't sting but buzz them to death; and lap-dog puppies on the sills of their doors; whereupon he cries, "Wolf! wolf!" and howls horridly with laughter. Most of all, he's a Humanist. He will put on the cloak of Erasmus, the cap of La Fontaine and the girdle of Gargantua, and, mounting the rostrum of an American thimble, harangue the nation through the eye of a needle. Oh, he's an adorable demon!

CULLEN

So this is your guide and mentor?

MATER

And true love! To be honest, I know he's a fib, a tease and a March-hare. That's why I introduced you. *You* will appreciate him. He's Michael's abomination. Michael can't bear to hear me even mention his names.

CULLEN

Names! Has he more than one?

MATER

Lots! Sometimes I call him Plato, sometimes Punch; but his formal family title is Conscience.

CULLEN

[*Passionately.*]

You captivating girl! Can you guess how you have bewildered—

MATER

No, no! You mustn't.

[*She starts from him to the edge of the piano, where she stands with a look half frightened, half abstracted, while he speaks to her.*]

CULLEN

You *must* let me stutter—cry out. My gladness hurts. You've burst upon me sudden and strange, like a sharp memory—a dear sickness in childhood, a first spring-day in the country. I am petulant with the joy of you, faint with the wonder. I don't recog-

nize even my voice, my words, the beautiful world in this room.

MATER

How could I!

CULLEN

Years, cold hard years of gray business and dull rascality—they're brushed to the horizon, and here you are blooming instead; and here I am speaking once more the heart of me—sharing with you fancy and beauty and love, just as once I used to share them in college days with my books, and the warm fields, golden with young cattle and the sunset. I don't know myself, Mater; you have made me all over.

MATER

Dear me! Dear me! What a wretch!

CULLEN

Oh, I know; I'm a chump and a rascal.

MATER

Purgatory's too good!

CULLEN

I have played a political trick and I'm forcing you to step into your brother's trap to save him. So be it! I cannot, I *will* not lose you. Only believe me—though it's a rascal that catches you, it's a better fellow will keep you. (Once you declare yourself mine—I'll lay out my life to be worthy of you.)

MATER

Now it's all up. I cannot possibly go on.

CULLEN

You can't believe me?

MATER

But worse yet, I *ought* to go on—now. You'd never forgive me.

CULLEN

Do you care what I'd do?

MATER

But worst of all, I *must* go on. Oh, I'll never forgive you.

CULLEN

For what blackest of my sins?

MATER

Treachery. I deposited all my faith in you, and now you have failed.

CULLEN

How can you speak so?

MATER

How can you *look* so? I *told* you to be a humorist, and you said you'd try.

CULLEN

Dear one, all that nonsense is passed away.

MATER

MATER

Sic transit gloria![*She feels for her handkerchief.*]

CULLEN

[*Appealingly.*]

Mater!

MATER

No! While you were witty, it was all right.

CULLEN

Mater, you're not crying?

MATER

[Yes — probably! There seems to be no end to it.
 Now] I'm beginning to feel sorry for myself.

CULLEN

You are an angel.

MATER

You don't know me. I'm a desert. But Moses smote the rock, and whosoever smiteth the rock of my self-pity —

CULLEN

Please!

MATER

After him — the deluge!

CULLEN

[*Dropping beside her, snatches her hand.*]

Dearest —

[*He kisses it.*]

MATER

[Starting away.]

Don't, don't!

[Enter MICHAEL. He strides toward Cullen.]

MICHAEL

How dare you!

MATER

Michael! Be careful! There's too much light.

[She springs to the curtains and partly draws them, obscuring the room.]

MICHAEL

[To Cullen.]

Explain again! Can you?

CULLEN

[Starting to his feet.]

Ask her.

MATER

Shade your eyes, boy. Sit down.

MICHAEL

[Ignoring her.]

First you try to taint my honor in the nation, and now in my family.

CULLEN

[Tense and quiet.]

Ask her.

MATER

MICHAEL

Did he sneak in the window, Mater? Or up the back-stairs? Look out for your silver and trinkets. We'd better search him.

MATER

Don't rack your voice so, dear. And your poor head! Remember what the doctor —

MICHAEL

He touched *you*!

MATER

There, there! Mr. Cullen was just telling me —

MICHAEL

[*Staring at her.*]

What! — What!

MATER

In the course of our conversation —

MICHAEL

You received him! You spoke with him again after — You've lied to me! All the worse for him.

MATER

Michael!

MICHAEL

[*To Cullen.*]

Go, or I'll put you out with my own hands.

CULLEN

[Imperturbably, looking from his watch to Mater.]

Five o'clock.

[He walks slowly toward the hall.]

MICHAEL

Faster!

[He moves toward Cullen; Mater comes between.]

MATER

Don't! Mr. Cullen has just asked me — Oh,
Michael!

MICHAEL

[Glaring.]

Quick!

MATER

To marry him.

MICHAEL

[To Cullen.]

You infamous —

MATER

Wait! And I have just — consented — with con-
ditions.

MICHAEL

Consented!

[He stares at Mater, and sways.]

You're stark mad.

MATER

Oh, no, I'm quite calm. See!

[Looking at Cullen.]

We both are.

MATER

MICHAEL

Then God curse him and you and all of us! Better. He'd kill you in your calmness and me—me in this —

MATER

Boy! My boy!

MICHAEL

[*Pointing toward the portrait.*]

You stood here with me.

MATER

[*With poignant appeal.*]

Please don't!

MICHAEL

You stood here with me. You stood here with me. It was on his anniversary.

MATER

Stop! I can't bear it. I'll explain every bit.

MICHAEL

Now *you'll* explain, too! He's given you the plague. — *Hide-the-thimble!* That was the game! — Go!

[*Driving her by his gesture toward the hall.*]

Go with him! Hypocrites—hand in hand. Your silly head's turned. — You're a thimble—a vanity! Go! You're empty, empty, empty — all but of sinning!

MATER

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MATER

[To Cullen.]

Come! He's too ill. — It's killing him.

[They hurry off.]

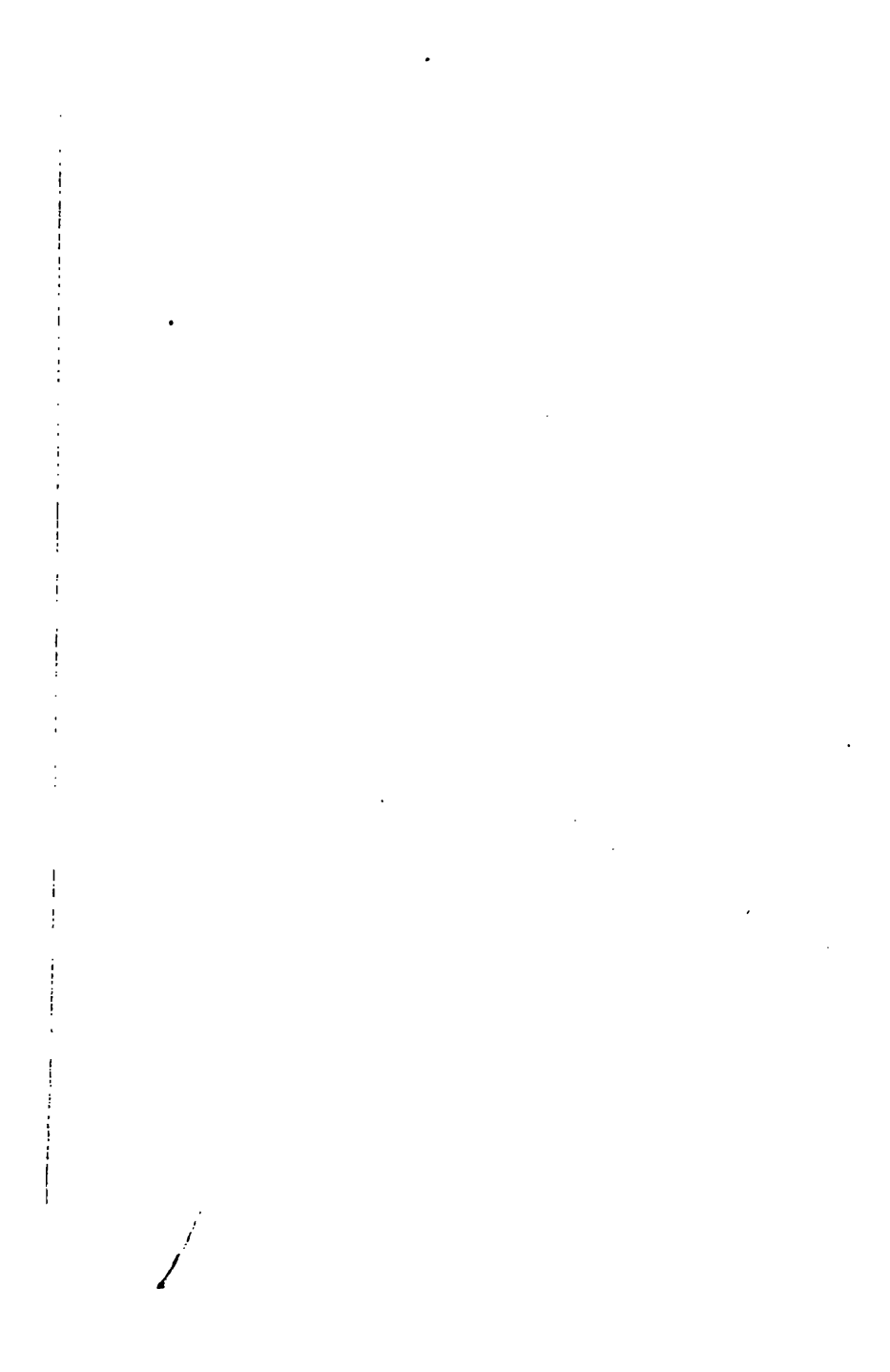
MICHAEL

Go, go, go, go!

[Turning with a hoarse cry.]

Father!

[He falls, lying near the portrait.]



ACT III

100

ACT III

The room is softly lighted by electricity through burners of amber-colored glass. The bay-window curtains are partly drawn, as at the end of Act II. Between them glows the whiter light of an unseen arc lamp outdoors.

On the divan sits MICHAEL — his head in his hands. Near him stands MARY. From outside comes the clamor of distant horns and bells and shouting, with occasional detonations of fireworks.

MARY

Listen now! They are nearer.

MICHAEL

[*Looks up dully.*]

You found me here, you say, — on the divan?

MARY

I found you sleeping here. I overslept myself. She didn't wake me from my nap, of course.

MICHAEL

Strange!

MARY

[*Indicating a decanter and empty wine-glass on the table.*]

You must have got yourself this port, after you recovered from your fainting.

MATER

MICHAEL

And I drunk that! I remember nothing of it.

[*He rises.*]

MARY

Are you stronger now?

MICHAEL

Much.

MARY

[*Listening with excitement.*]

Just hear them!

MICHAEL

And all this you've been telling me—what was it?

MARY

The flowers he sent here for Miss Deaŋ were for *her*—not me. He mistook her from the first for your sister; and she evidently has let him believe it.

MICHAEL

[*His face twitching.*]

Stop! Don't speak of this again. It's unbearable.

[*Mary puts her hand affectionately on his shoulder. They embrace quickly; then he puts her away from him.—With the noise of approaching horns are now mingled the strains of a brass-band.*]

What time is it?

MARY

Quarter of twelve. The committee were here, and several reporters.

{ I can't see them. } MICHAEL

MARY

I told them to come back in an hour.

[*The shouting voices outside break irregularly and then harmoniously into the tune of "John Brown's Body." Mary rushes to the bay-window and looks out.*]

Such crowds in the street, Michael! They are marching here.

MICHAEL

I have dreamed of this for years!

[*He shuts out the sounds with his hands.*]

THE VOICES OUTSIDE

[*Singing deeply to the brazen blare of the instruments and the rhythm of marching.*]

They have strewn the burning hearths of men with
darkness and with mire,

They have heaped the burning hearts of men with
ashes of desire,

Yet from out those hearts and hearths still leaps the
quick eternal fire

Whose flame is liberty.

[*The singing ceases; cries of "Dean! Dean!" resound beneath the window; Mary makes a gesture for Michael to come; he sinks into a chair, still stopping his ears. The voices take up the song again.*]

For the freedom of the laborer is freedom from his
toil,

And freedom of the citizen is right to share the soil,

And the freedom of our country is the loosing of the
coil

That chokes posterity.

[*Cries of "Dean! Speech!" etc., and the cheering grows more insistent. Mary bends over Michael with an appealing look.*]

MICHAEL

They must go away.

MARY

They won't, till you speak to them. Come!

MICHAEL

[*Rising slowly.*]

All right. One pang is no worse than the other.

[*He goes to the casement and throws it open. Mary accompanies him, but sits far back in the corner of the window-seat, left. The cheering becomes wilder. Just as Michael opens the window, there emerges [right] from behind the heavy folds of the curtain, MATER. As Michael speaks to the invisible crowd below, she stands at the edge of the curtain, watching him rapturously.*]

MICHAEL

Citizens :

You have honored me by electing me as a leader. Therefore I will honor you by leading you toward the goal I promised. That goal is civic liberty — the self-interest of each in the happiness of all. Remember, citizens, I will *lead* you, and not follow. If there be some of you who later shall vacillate or hang back,

they shall not hinder the advancing cause. I am now a captain in your ranks; and until you shall level your votes at me again and bring me down, I will remain your captain.

[He turns from the window and the cheering outside bursts again into song, gradually diminishing in the distance.]

MATER

[Coming forward impetuously]

My boy! My glorious boy!

MICHAEL

[Staring at her.]

Mater!

MATER

[Throwing her arms about him.]

Elected! At last!

MICHAEL

[Putting her back, with a shudder.]

At last!

MATER

Didn't you like your serenade?

[Gazes an instant, then turns toward Mary, frightened.]

Is he worse?

MARY

[With fierceness.]

Will you torture him now?

MATER

Torture!

MATER

MARY

So *that* was why you wore them !

MATER

[*Smiling.*]

Yes. Didn't it work well !

MARY

Oh, it's unspeakable !

[*She rushes from the room.*]

MATER

[*Bewildered.*]

Hasn't she told you ? — The absurd mix-up ?

MICHAEL

Mother and daughter : Yes. She has told me.

MATER

That's good. Then the play's over. — Well, I'm waiting for bouquets.

MICHAEL

[*Smiling painfully.*]

Of daffodils ?

MATER

Anything yellow and becoming. Wasn't I monstrously clever ?

MICHAEL

Monstrously, monstrously ! — For you *are* a mother.

MATER

And fat and forty, my dear! To impersonate your own progeny in the sere and yellow, when, as Shakespeare has it, "The heydey in the blood is tame," and so, to lure your delightful villain lover into the secret tower of your family, and there — with the blazing edge of a life-membership ticket — to blind him, and bind him body and soul, till the election bells ring out "Liberty and Life-work!" to the hero — There's the imagination of Molière and the *finesse* of Rachel!

MICHAEL

What devil has sent you here to damn me like this?

MATER

[*Pausing, as if struck.*]

Boysie! Don't you understand?

MICHAEL

Of course I understand. And for the first time in my life, I curse God for understanding.

MATER

Forgive me. You're weak and ill. I was so happy I'd almost forgot. Forgive me.

MICHAEL

You come to me now — *now* to ask forgiveness? Don't tempt me beyond my strength. I have cursed God and myself; don't —

MATER

[*Starting to leave.*]

I'll go, dear. Rest awhile.

MICHAEL

[*Detaining her.*]

No; but you shall not go. Now is as good as never. Perhaps when you are gone, you might forget to ask again. And then to remind you — I myself might forget my duty.

MATER

Duty!

MICHAEL

But since you have forgot so much — so be it! You hated anniversaries, you told me. Now I know why. But you love your old poetry and superstitions. Listen, then!

[*The clock is striking twelve.*]

Midnight: At this hour, your forgotten shall return again. Once before you showed him to me in a glass; now I show him to you in the flesh.

[*Imperiously.*]

Look at me, Mater. Do you remember *now*?

MATER

[*Pensively.*]

All but the name.

MICHAEL

Must I speak it again and remind you how sacred a name —

MATER

[*With gentle reserve.*]

No, boy; you cannot speak it; for not even you

ever heard *that* name he called me by, and I will never tell you.

MICHAEL

I stand here in his place and I will rebuke—

MATER

[*With moved dignity.*]

Your mother! Not — his wife.

MICHAEL

And if it be necessary —

MATER

[*Quiet but commanding.*]

Take care, my son! He would not permit you.

[*She looks toward the portrait.*]

MICHAEL

[*No longer dictatorial, but appealingly.*]

Look there, then, Mater. Look well, and think — think of your wretched, frivolous falling-off — from such honorable manhood, to such depravity — a scoundrel —

[*Mater turns away, hiding her face from Michael. In the distance the shouts and music and bells are faintly heard. Mater listens, bowing her head convulsively.*]

Yes, it is well for you to sob, and remember.

MATER

O memorable midnight! Ever on this night, my Michael, even after a hundred years, when your childrens' children shall pass by my forgotten grave—

MICHAEL

My God! You are *laughing!*

MATER

Yes, boy; and the flowers that spring from me then shall titter in the face of my tombstone, while the little honeysuckles blow election horns, and the daffodils laugh till their petals are filled with tears.

MICHAEL

Oh, you are as light as those petals, and your tears are as unhuman. Irredeemably shallow — fickle, fickle woman! A butterfly on a daffodil — and so you are caught in his fingers; by a common hypocrite, a crooked scoundrel, a political rat —

[*Seizing her wrist.*]

Can nothing sacred make you to see yourself and him for what —

MATER

Gently, my mad prince! Mr. Cullen is not yet King of Denmark, nor even a rat in the wall; and though you have closeted your mother to show to her her own foolish little face, please don't fancy you *must be cruel only to be kind.*

MICHAEL

Mater, if ever I should go mad, it would be an inheritance from you.

MATER

“O wad some power the giftie gie us” — to find

out! Now lie down, dear. How did my port wine agree with you?

MICHAEL

You gave it to me?

MATER

Yes, you were a little —

[Touches her forehead.]

MICHAEL

Where's Cullen, then?

MATER

So you *will* let me explain. — I don't know where Mr. Cullen is.

MICHAEL

But you went together —

MATER

As far as the front hall. Then he begged to come back for Welsh rarebit, and I returned here to tuck you up comfily. He promised not to go near the ballot-boxes.

MICHAEL

Ballot-boxes!

MATER

And you see he has kept his word; for I have triumphed and you have been elected.

MICHAEL

By the people. How does that concern you?

MATER

MATER

Me, my dear? I *am* the people. I elected you.

MICHAEL

So you did bribe him with your gold!

MATER

Yes; so he said. "Pure gold," he called me. He admires my hair.

MICHAEL

[*Gasping.*]

What! You not only broke your word to me—
Mater! You have *sold* yourself?

MATER

No; I have sold Mr. Cullen — poor man!

[*Slowly and distinctly.*]

In plain, predigested English for infants: I have
fooled him, my dear.

MICHAEL

[*Gazes an instant, then bursts forth wildly.*]

And you have fooled *me*! I will never forgive you.

MATER

For my necessary little subterfuge?

MICHAEL

Subterfuge, in my life-work! Oh, I'll renounce
my election.

MATER

And desert your country, for a fib or two of mine?

MICHAEL

A fib is a falsehood; and falsehood between mother and son is unforgivable.

MATER

But it's *right*—sometimes.

MICHAEL

No, wrong; unforgivably wrong.

MATER

Come, boy, admit: *This* time it was common sense.

MICHAEL

Common sense!

MATER

And remember you've said yourself: Nothing can be wrong when it's common sense. So kiss and make up.

MICHAEL

Make up! I see! You'll try to do with me what you did with father. You'd dissemble first—and *afterwards* you'd make up. But not so with me! Don't dream it! I will never—never make up!

[*Exit impetuously, lower left.*]

MATER

MATER

[*Repressing tears, sinks into a chair.*]

The dear old tragedy! Heighde'me!

[*CULLEN comes up the stairs and enters. He carries a white tissue-paper parcel, which he lays on the piano.*]

CULLEN

Mater!

MATER

[*Rising with a start.*]

You? Isn't it rather late — for you?

CULLEN

[*Showing his watch.*]

It's to-morrow.

MATER

[*Shaking her head.*]

To-morrow never comes.

CULLEN

But *I* have come, to ask —

MATER

After Michael? He's better. He's in the second stage already.

CULLEN

The real fact is —

MATER

There are three, you know — in the *masculine*.

CULLEN

Three stages?

MATER

In the tragedy. In the first stage, you wake up—to the feminine offence; in the second, you break up—well, anything; in the third, you make up—everything. Wake up, Break up, Make up: there's the trilogy of Man!

CULLEN

My dear Mater, as for me—

MATER

Oh, as for you, you're not even in the *first* yet. You're not likely to *wake up* till bed-time. I've set your alarm very late.

CULLEN

May I get in a word?—I've brought you a swap for the thimble.

[*Handing it.*]

MATER

A ring! So you've sent for the parson—hop, skip and jump?

CULLEN

Not as hasty as that. This is merely—

MATER

[*Taking the ring.*]

A moonstone!

MATER

CULLEN

[*Softly.*]

In souvenir.

MATER

The stone of fickleness.

CULLEN

What?

MATER

What a lovely surprise! They will be so delighted.

CULLEN

They will?

[*The knob of the door—lower left—turns with a slight sound, the door opens a crack, and Mary coughs ostentatiously outside.*]

What's that?

MATER

That's just the click, before it goes off.

[*Enter MARY.*]

MARY

I beg your pardon.

MATER

Come in.

MARY

Didn't Rudolf say he would come?

MATER

Yes, dear; he's coming in for a Welsh rarebit. And look! See what our friend, Mr. Cullen, has brought to you and Rudolf.

MARY

[*Staring.*]For *us*? A ring!

CULLEN

[*Fidgeting.*]

My dear Miss Dean—

MATER

In souvenir of Michael's election and the announcement of your engagement to Mr. Verbeck.

MARY

[*Drawing herself up.*]

Mother!

[*A pause: Mater, with rigid, outstretched hand holding the ring toward Mary, does not stir an eyelash.*]

CULLEN

[*Barely vocalizing the word.*]*Mother?*

MATER

[*Relaxing.*]

You remember my daughter, whom you met at the Robinsons'?

[*Cullen bows slightly.*]At the *riddle* party!

CULLEN

[*Murmurs faintly.*]

"Wake up."

[*Enter RUDOLF, from the hall.*]

MATER

MATER

[*Still holding out the ring toward Mary.*]

Such a lovely surprise!

RUDOLF

Hulloa! So I'm just in time for the ceremony.

MARY

[*Going to him eagerly.*]

Rudolf dear! You got my letter?

RUDOLF

Sure, I got it.

[*Looking at Cullen.*]

Ask him.

CULLEN

[*Mutters.*]

"Break up."

MARY

Ask whom?

RUDOLF

Your ring-partner there in the ceremony. I thought I might as well turn up for the betrothals, so as not to spoil your fun.

MARY

Betrothals!

CULLEN

[*With a whimsical expression, takes from his pocket Mary's letter and lays it on the table beside Mater.*]

"Make up?"

[*Mater, taking it, speaks to Mary, who is gazing astounded.*]

MATER

I was showing Mr. Cullen your beautiful handwriting, dear.

MARY

[*Snatching from Mater the letter.*]

You — you showed him!

RUDOLF

[*Lifts the thimble from the table and twirls it.*]

First it was a thimble, and now it's a ring.

MARY

Is this a farce? That's mother's; it belongs to — to them.

RUDOLF

[*Beginning to read from it.*]

M.D. —

MATER

[*Taking the thimble.*]

Mother Dean, Doctor of Matrimony! — It's mine and I shall keep it always. Mr. Cullen helped me win it — as a booby prize.

CULLEN

[*Nodding.*]

Booby! — *It! It forever!*

RUDOLF.

I say, but Mater —

[*Mary beckons Rudolf to the bay-window, where they converse eagerly.*]

CULLEN

“Mater!” — Mater, from you I have learned my first advanced Latin and diplomacy.

MATER

Think of me, then, as your Alma Mater.

[Lifting from the table the big envelope.]

Receive your diploma, with honorable mention in Politics, and go forth now to face your new world.

[She hands to him the envelope. He takes it with mingled pleasantry and emotion.]

CULLEN

My world! You have made it over new so frequently that now it's all nebulous fire.

MATER

So the prize graduate always feels on his Commencement.

CULLEN

Commencement! — May I then hope that even still — or must I be hopeless?

MATER

Hopeless of what?

CULLEN

That I may come again enchanted, and find you as before, enchantress, in your golden garden, with your demon —

MATER

Always! Here you shall find Judy, with thimble and needle, still fighting the battles of her baby.

CULLEN

No, but Juliet —

MATER

By any other name — may wear a thimble!

CULLEN

Why, it's a dream — ridiculous! You — you, my Madonna of the daffodils —

MATER

All madonnas must have babes, you know.

[*With happy self-satisfaction.*]

And mine's elected! I'm so much obliged for your faith in me.

CULLEN

And I for yours.

MATER

[*Triumphantly.*]

Oh, but you were transparent!

CULLEN

[*With assumed naïveté.*]

Easy, was I?

MATER

As easy as fibbing. Though, I must confess, that when you threatened me with ballot-boxes at the last minute, I trembled.

MATER

CULLEN

And *I* must confess, that when I threatened you with those ballot-boxes, I fibbed.

MATER

[*Blankly.*]

You fibbed! How is it possible?

CULLEN

Well, you see, it's possible for an expert to count two thousand votes wrong—but hardly twenty-thousand!

[*He looks at her with shrewd amusement. She frowns an instant, then beams upon him.*]

MATER

Mr. Cullen, I love you! I've done you an injustice.

[*She holds out her hand. Starting in ardent surprise, he reaches to take it.*]

You *are* a humorist, after all.

[*Cullen checks himself, smiles at her smile, bows and kisses the tips of her fingers.*]

CULLEN

I tried *hard*.

MATER

And I shall always depend on you. And Michael, I trust, will continue to prosper in politics?

CULLEN

Michael might prosper in Hell, with such a mother.

MATER

Such a devil of a mother, you *would* say?

CULLEN

I can't express — what I would say.

MARY

[*Coming forward with Rudolf.*]

Mother, I can't make it out. If that ring —

RUDOLF

And besides, Mary's been telling me —

MATER

Ha! Rudolf! You are just — how do you say it?
— *just the cheese!*

RUDOLF

What for?

MATER

For the Welsh rarebit. It's in the kitchen. Will you ask Nellie —

RUDOLF

[*Dubiously.*]

What, again? I'm all tangled up.

MATER

[*Putting one arm through his and the other around Mary.*]

Now this is what I call a true-lover's knot.

MARY

[*Embarrassed.*]

Mother!

MATER

RUDOLF

[*With enthusiasm.*]

She's all right, Mary.

MATER

[*Waving them toward the door.*]

And plenty of cheese for Mr. Cullen!

CULLEN

I regret! I regret! I would give my career to remain, but destiny forbids — and dyspepsia.

[*Lifting the white tissue-paper parcel from the piano.*]

Machiavel of ladies, within your realm of flowers, I have met — and I have lost — my better half.

MATER

He who loses — even half of himself shall find a whole kingdom.

[*Noticing the parcel.*]

What's this?

CULLEN

The white flag. Dearest Mater, — “short for Matilda,” — with this I surrender the field, with my *filial* allegiance.

[*He hands her the parcel. While she stands unwrapping the folds of paper, he goes quietly to the hall, where he pauses — her back being toward him.*]

MATER

[*Exclaiming with pleasure.*]

Pansies!

CULLEN

You'll supply the quotation.

[*He goes down the stairs.*]

MATER

[*Starting.*]

Is he gone? — [*Finis!*] Farewell, Romeo!

MARY

Mother, I feel sure there's a joke somewhere; I wish I could see the point.

MATER

[*Pensively.*]

I've lost sight of it myself, dear — for the moment.

MARY

[*Awkwardly caressing her.*]

Anyway — forgive me.

MATER

You darling!

[*Mussing Mary's hair and taking off her spectacles.*]

Such eyes — behind windows!

[*Pushing her toward Rudolf.*]

Now *you* go and play Juliet.

Sir Lover, light down and hunt the Rarebit for your lady-love.

RUDOLF

[*At the door.*]

Come on, Mary.

MARY

Rudolfo !

[*They go out together. From below comes the sound of a door closing. Mater, the pansies in her hands, goes to the bay-window, knocks on the pane, pushes open the casement and looks down.*]

MATER

[*Waving the flowers.*]

Remember about your laundry !

[*Tosses two or three pansies out.*]

For thoughts !

[*She waves again, closes the casement, comes to the table and drops the pansies absent-mindedly. Then she goes slowly to the piano, sits, plays and sings quietly. While she does so, Michael opens the door, upper left, and stands on the sill, in inward agitation.*]

Long ago in the old moonlight,

I lost my hero and lover ;

Strong and tender and stern and right,

Never shall night

Nor day his brow uncover. —

Ah, my heart, that is over !

[*MICHAEL enters ; Mater starts up, but sits again, as he makes a moody gesture and strides darkly across the room, struggling with himself. Mater resumes.*]

Yet still, for joy of the fellowship

That bound us both through the years long after,

I laugh to think how he bit his lip,

For the test of love —

And the best of love — is laughter.

MICHAEL

[*Hoarsely.*]

Mater! You're right. It's common sense. I make up.

MATER

[*Darting to his arms.*]

Ah, my hero!

[*Clinging to him, she looks past him—smiling through tears—toward the portrait.*]

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